Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks With
Mary Alice Eschweiler
SHEPHERD'S PATCH
Hartland, Wisconsin

This interview was conducted at the home of Mary Alice Eschweiler in March of 1994 by Jennifer Job.

How long have you had Bernese Mountain Dogs?

I purchased my first Bernese Mountain Dog in June of 1959.

How old were you?

Eleven years old. There were probably 25 Bernese Mountain Dogs in the country at the time. So they were extremely rare and nobody knew what a Bernese Mountain Dog was, including the American Kennel Club. I had decided from a picture that that was the breed I wanted and when I wrote to the American Kennel Club to ask them about the breed, they said that there were no clubs, but that they had the names of eight people who owned them. And so we wrote those eight people and those eight people lived as far from Wisconsin as one could possibly live – Texas, New Jersey, Washington, and so on. (laughter). So we pursued it from there and I was able to find a puppy from Vermont.

Was that the first dog that you ever had?

Yes, it was the first dog that I ever had.

Did you ever have dogs before that?

I had never had dogs before that. My mother had refused. I've gotten back at her in the meantime.

Did you ever show that dog?

I showed her and I joined the local kennel club and I trained her in obedience and I showed her in conformation and I showed her in Junior Showmanship. I usually lost in Junior Showmanship. And dog shows were few and far between. Living in northern Wisconsin at the time, I had to drive a long distance and depend on my parents to take me to the dog shows so it wasn't easy to go. But I did show that dog in both conformation – and there was no competition – the judges had never seen a Bernese Mountain Dog, for the most part. So she was never ever going to get a championship no matter how many times I showed her. I did show her in obedience and she was the first dog to ever win a title in the breed.

What was her name?

Her name was Aya of Veralp and she earned her CD. I didn't go any further from that because the jumps were too difficult for her, and I grew up. (laughter) I went away to school so I wasn't able to train her, but we earned her CD.

Now, you haven't had a litter in nine years? How many did you have up to that point?

I had six litters.

Are there any that stand out in your mind as being a great litter?

My first litter was a litter of one and she was a terrific bitch. She was a champion, she was typey. She had a wonderful temperament and she was never bred. She stood out in my mind as one of the best dogs I ever bred. I had kept her. My third litter, which had ten puppies, and that was a real change, was an outstanding litter in that it produced a lot of dogs of excellent type and overall consistency in the litter of nice puppies. That was my C litter.

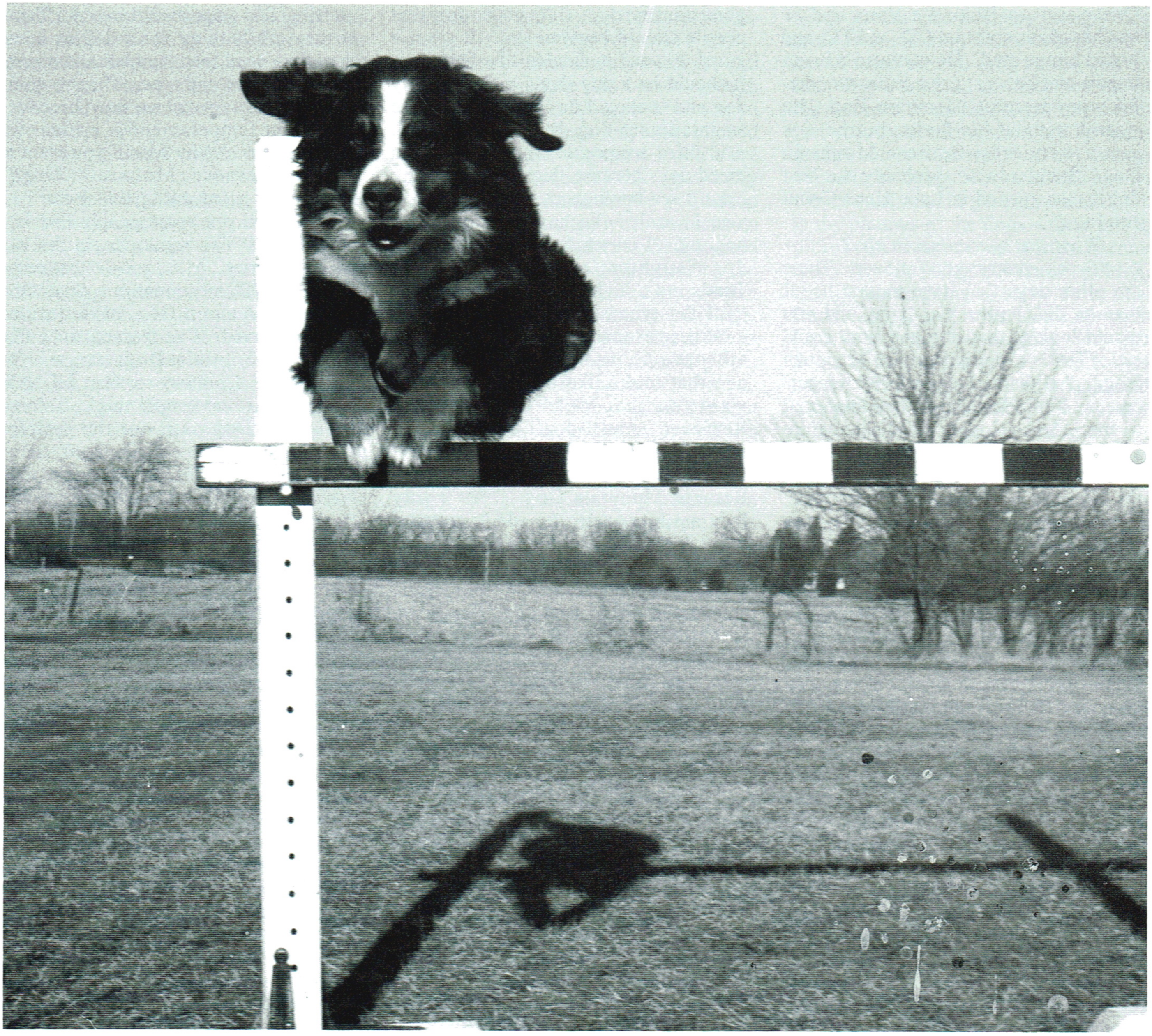
Do you have a scheme when you name your litters?

I name them according to the alphabet. The first litter was Shepherd's Patch Auntie Al.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

My mother and my father had been raising sheep and so ... Actually we didn't develop that kennel name until about 1968. I had been unsuccessful at breeding dogs up until that time. My first litter was in the early '70's probably, 1974. So, I had owned a lot of Bernese Mountain Dogs, but I never did have a litter until 1974 for various and sundry reasons. I'd owned a stud dog, but that doesn't establish a kennel name.

Who was the stud dog?



Ch. Dina de l'Armary UDT.

The stud dog was Ultra von Oberfeld, a Swiss import. He was the second dog I ever owned. We were like everyone else, we liked the breed so much that we decided to get another one and imported him from Switzerland. He was a very nice dog, but also a dog that when I showed him, judges did not know the breed. I showed him both in obedience and conformation; he did not earn his CD. He had two legs, but we never finished the third one. He was bred to three bitches in Oregon, one of them did not take. One of them was owned by Bea Knight who had Sanctuary Woods Kennel and the other one was owned by someone else. So he was the sire of the first champion Bernese Mountain Dog.

It was interesting because he was never going to become a champion, too. There was still no competition in the '60's. I purchased him in 1963 and there was not one other dog in the ring for earning points, so he was never going to earn his championship so it was quite special that he sired the first champion.

So you've really been a driving force in the Bernese Mountain Dogs?

I've been involved for a long time ... (laughter) Now you understand my story about the lady who said, "I thought you were old."

Was your first champion the biggest champion out of your kennel? Well, I guess he wasn't from your kennel, right?

That first champion of the breed was Sanctuary Wood's Black Lancer. He is a dog that is in a lot of pedigrees, way, way back. If you were to examine pedigrees, you'd find Black Lancer in pedigrees from way back. I don't know that he was the best dog or the most winningest dog ever.

What was the best dog that you've ever bred?

That's a pretty subjective kind of question. I've had a lot of dogs that have been my favorite and not because of the breed standard necessarily ... I've had two outstanding male dogs of my own, not that I bred but I've owned.

One was Jean Henri La Vaux and he had has championship, CD, and TD, and I used him at stud. He was also a Swiss import and he was just a really wonderful typey Bernese Mountain Dog. He wasn't without his faults, but he was just a wonderful Bernese Mountain Dog. Standardwise, probably the best dog I ever owned is Lake Haus Count Jim In.

What was special about him?

Typey, pretty, good mover. There are other dogs that have moved better than he did, but he was typey and you would look at that dog and you would say, "That's a pretty Bernese Mountain Dog." And he had a wonderful temperament. Temperament is very important to me. And a lovely head; heads are very important to me. And he had the body to go with the head.

Do you want to talk about that? What is your interpretation of the standard?

My interpretation of the standard is that when one looks at the standard one looks at the dog as a whole in spite of the fact that I said that heads are important. And I do think heads are important. I think that when one is breeding dogs one looks at the dog to see if the dog looks like a Bernese Mountain Dog and if it is sound structurally and temperamentally. Then weigh all of those other aspects of the standard that come into play there. And, obviously, don't breed two dogs with two major faults together. I think that the standard is there as a guideline for us and we need to visualize what the perfect Bernese Mountain Dog is and then work towards that rather than to work toward one specific aspect of the breed.

You said that you think that temperament is important, but you've talked about type and soundness, also. How would you rate those three in order of importance?

I don't think I would rate them in order of importance. I think that temperament is of utmost importance and I would be very loathe to breed a dog that didn't have a sound temperament. Whether a person is buying a dog for a show-quality dog or buying a dog for a pet-quality dog, it is our responsibility as breeders to breed dogs who have sound temperaments. There is nothing more heartbreaking than having a dog that doesn't have good temperament, and I've had a couple of them. There is nothing more rewarding than having a dog that has a good temperament, and for the most part, one of the best attributes of this breed is that it's got a tremendous, loving, temperament. It's a good family dog. It's not a dog that people should be afraid of. It's not a guard dog and it shouldn't be ferocious. It should be a dog that's a good family dog and it should be intelligent. I like an intelligent dog, but ... (laughter). And there are people who are trying to breed dogs because they are intelligent. I don't see intelligence as the utmost ... yes, I would. To have an intelligent dog, too. I currently own a very dumb dog (laughter) and I still love her. That's not a high priority. I personally think that type is very important. I want a Bernese Mountain Dog that looks like a Bernese Mountain Dog. I don't want one that looks like a Collie. I don't want one that looks like a Golden Retriever. And I don't want one that looks like a Saint Bernard or a Newfoundland. I want one that looks like a Bernese Mountain Dog. That's why they are breed specific. If I wanted a Saint Bernard, I'd go out and buy a Saint Bernard. I don't want a Saint Bernard. Soundness is just like temperament – it should be part of the giving in breeding dogs.

When you were breeding, is that what you were breeding for, temperament and soundness?

And type. All three of those.

Have you established a distinguishable line?

No. I wasn't trying to. That wasn't necessarily my goal. My goal was not to produce the most puppies. I think that I would say that I was trying to breed the ideal Bernese Mountain Dog, but "distinguishable line" was not my goal. I tried to do that in the restrictions that I had, but I have never been interested in owning a large kennel. I may not have had that as a fleeting idea in my youth, but that's not a priority in my life and that's not something that I need to ego trip for.

What has been your goal in Bernese Mountain Dogs?

I think one of my goals is to educate people as to what a good Bernese Mountain Dog is. However that may be. I think there are people out there who can produce good Bernese Mountain Dogs, but the number of phone calls that I receive saying, "Where can I buy one?" is another thing. And people have to be educated as to what they are looking for in buying a Bernese Mountain Dog rather than just buying one from a breeder.

What should they be looking for?

It depends on what they want. If they want a pet-quality dog, which most people who call me are looking for, then I think that soundness and temperament are the most important things for them. If they are looking for a dog to breed then they need that soundness, temperament, structure and type. They're going to need the type when they breed. I think that temperament is critical for most people. "Why would you want to own a Bernese Mountain Dog?" "Because I want a dog that I can live with." Well, for some people that is a Dachshund. For some people that's a Boston Terrier. Most people that come to me to ask me questions about the Bernese Mountain Dog, have decided upon the breed. I've learned since that Bernese Mountain Dogs are not for everybody. Contrary to what I ONCE thought or some people think, Bernese Mountain Dogs are not the dog for everybody to own.

Since you've started they've become more popular. Does popularization help or harm the breed?

A little conservative part of me that says that it hasn't helped the breed in that anytime a breed becomes popular, people start producing dogs regardless of quality just for money. And that is certainly true now. There are any number of people producing these dogs just for the sake of money. These puppies are very, very expensive now. And in spite of the fact that anybody who has ever been conscientious about breeding dogs says you'll never make money breeding dogs, that's not true anymore. You can make money breeding dogs. People are making money breeding dogs because the prices that they are charging are so astronomically high. Some people are not making money breeding dogs because they maybe are doing things right; maybe they are doing things conscientiously; maybe they're shipping their bitches across the country to the best dog rather than taking the dog to the dog next door. Therefore, there goes your profit right out the window in the airplane fare or in your stud fee, or whatever it may be. I think the thing about the popularization of the breed is that you're buying the dog because it's a rare dog. It's not a rare dog anymore. And there were some people who bought Bernese Mountain Dogs because they were a rare thing to have; nobody else had them. Well, that's not true anymore. Is that good or bad? I don't know. If one were to look at the gene pool being expanded then I think the popularization of the breed has been good because we have a far greater gene pool than we had years ago. When we first started breeding Bernese Mountain Dogs, the gene pool was so limited with 100 dogs in the country, that you had to take whatever dog was good and was there. Looking at pedigrees was irrelevant because you had to just put two dogs together to just get a litter. We tried not to make it irrelevant, but we did.

(Took break to answer the telephone.)

Gene pool, I think that it is wonderful now that people have so many dogs in the breed to go to. Whether that means, linebreeding, outcrossing or inbreeding, there is a healthy choice out there, which we didn't have before. And I'd like to look at that as a positive. The negative is that a lot of people don't use that healthy choice wisely. They go to this dog or they go to the dog that is closest, or they go to the dog that they think fits their line the best, but it may not be the best dog for their bitch. Because of their ego trips or whatever it is that they decided to get into it.

I think that what you'll find is a wide variety of opinions about linebreeding, inbreeding, outcrossing. I've always outcrossed, which is probably why in my six litters I've never had a distinctive type, "Oh, that's a Shepherd's Patch dog." People know what I like and if they were to say that looks like a Shepherd's Patch dog it is because they know what kind of dogs I will use in my breeding program. But I think that the wisdom of how one uses one, I'll let that be at the discretion at other people. Linebreeding has real purposes, outcrossing has some real purposes, and the popularization of the breed now is such that we have a much larger gene pool to put out from. I would hate to see the popularization of this breed mean that it's going to be a deterioration of the breed, because they're a wonderful breed of dogs. There are a lot of people – and I was one of them – I mean I got my first Bernese Mountain Dog, I bought her as a pet, and the first thing I wanted to do was to breed her because she was nice. But she was in fact a pet. Thank God, she never had puppies.

(Telephone call.)

(Looking at pictures)

This was my C litter. This was Henry and this was Zyta von Nessa Lacker owned by Mary Dawson and she was the first Bernese Mountain Dog to win the Bernese Mountain Dog Specialty. And they were bred together and produced this bitch whose name was Dagne, and Dagne was bred to this dog, Bruce. And I had ten puppies out of that litter and I think there were five or six champions. There was one dog who had both majors before he was hit by a car, but he didn't finish his championship. It was a very, very nice litter.

When I think about my dogs, and the mental exercise that I went through to prepare for this interview was to think about the dogs that I have loved and lived with (laughter), I don't see myself as a breeder, that that's my importance. I think maybe you asked me that. I think often what we focus on is where are we, and everybody would love to be the ultimate breeder or the ultimate winner. Well, we can't, we just can't. It's not physically possible. There is only one dog that wins at Westminster. There is only one dog that wins the National Specialty. I mean there are only so many accolades that you can take around, and my efforts haven't been there. My efforts have been really and truly enjoying my own dogs. That's my primary purpose in owning this breed, is that they are there for me. That's why I buy Bernese Mountain Dogs – because they are MY enjoyment in my life. I would like to give something back to the breed for all the enjoyment I receive. I like living with a dog that looks like a Bernese Mountain Dog, that smells like a Bernese Mountain Dog, and acts like a Bernese Mountain Dog, and runs or doesn't run, as the case may be, like a Bernese Mountain Dog. They are not the most active dog in the world. They are very laid-back dogs. They enjoy lying out in the sun, resting. George Carlin had a line, "Dogs doing what dogs do best and that's hanging out on the front porch snoring." Something to that effect. And that's what a Bernese Mountain Dog does best.

I remember one point of time that I was showing my dog and the dog had won Best of Breed and we were in the Group, and I don't know what I was doing with this dog. I don't know if I was sitting with this dog on the floor in the Group ring and the dog had his paws on my shoulders or he was licking my face, but one of my dog club people said, "You know you were quite unprofessional in the Group ring." And I thought, "So!" I was having fun and the dog was having fun. I don't care, I was never going to win a Group so it didn't matter to me. (laughter) I did like to explore the great possibilities that Bernese Mountain Dogs have. I mean face it, they are not Greyhounds, they'll never be fast, but they are good at carting. They are good at tracking. They can be good at obedience. They can be good at agility. They're pretty lousy swimmers, though. They are wonderful therapy dogs; that's something I've never gotten into because therapy dog stuff is something fairly recent and I haven't had time to do it in my current life. But I think all of those aspects of the Bernese Mountain Dogs other than just strictly conformation are so wonderful about this breed. They are so versatile in being able to do all of that sort of stuff. So, in general, when I look at my pictures of the dogs – there is one picture in this box of a little weeny teeny itty-bitty dog out there tracking, but it's never going to show up in this. But I can tell and it just takes me right back to that thrill of tracking with that dog and finding the glove. The two of us out there working in that field and just having a blast. And I think that that is the wonderful thing about dogs.

(Looking at a picture) I've never smiled as much as I smiled on that day, and that was the day that that dog finished her UD. And it wasn't without a great deal of effort. I think that she was at 32 obedience trials just to get the UD. There were no records made, there were no ... she got a number of first places only because all of the other dogs failed. Getting a UD on a dog is not an easy thing. She did it jumping full height. Bernese Mountain Dogs had to jump their height at their shoulder; she had to jump 34 inches. She was little, she was feisty. She was bright. She was the only dog that I've ever taken into the ring and gotten a negative point on because of misbehavior in the ring because she decided she was going to run around and play games. She not only failed the scent exercise for going out and jumping over the jumps, but she got docked five points for misbehavior, because when I called her in to me, she went and jumped over the jumps instead. I mean, that's kind of unheard of. Bernese Mountain Dogs don't like to jump the jumps.

And what was her name?

It was Dina de l'Armary. She had a championship and she got her Tracking Dog title as well. I just had a lot of fun with that dog. There was nothing spectacular about her as a Bernese Mountain Dog at all.

Sounds like she was pretty spectacular to you.

Yes, she was spectacular to me. (Showing a picture) I took that without a telephoto lens I want you to know. That means that that dog was on me. To call your dog over a jump at 32 inches high, and in fact be practically under the jump, and have your dog say, "Okay, I'll jump over you." She was a spectacular dog. She was a fun dog. Just a darn fun dog to have around.

When you started out you said that the AKC only knew of eight owners of Bernese Mountain Dogs.

One was in Louisiana and he is the person who got the breed recognized in 1937. He did it single-handedly at the time. He just imported two dogs from Switzerland and said, "We're going to recognize these." Now you need to have a thousand dogs in your stud book and all sorts of things. That's why Bernese Mountain Dogs were able to be recognized. It wouldn't have been until probably the mid-'70's that we would have been able to build a thousand dogs into a stud book to get them recognized. So it's a different kind of development than other kinds of breeds. If you look at Shar Peis, when they first came to this country there were 50 of them and then people bred them and bred them and bred them. You talk about popularization of a breed, they're a veterinarian's nightmare. That "let's breed them so that we have lots of numbers" kind of breed. And, you know, people pay a thousand dollars to have a rare breed.

What I wanted to talk about was how you've seen the evolution of the Bernese Mountain Dog. Not just as far as becoming recognized by AKC and becoming more popular ...

The Bernese Mountain Dog Club was formed in 1968 by a group of people. By 1968 there were 100 people who owned Bernese Mountain Dogs, and were very much aware of the possibility of having a breed grow too rapidly, and recognized the problems that we had at that time, which were hip dysplasia and lack of type. There was a lot of effort and peer pressure from one person to another to breed dogs who were free of hip dysplasia. Now, there were those people who said that if you're just breeding for hips, you're going to lose type. But I think that there was a remarkable effort, and we all would get into fights with each other about those issues, but I think that there was a considerable amount of peer pressure at least to influence people into saying, "No, we really have to breed dogs with sound hips." And so, though hip dysplasia is not genetically an easy thing to breed out, and although we certainly do have some dogs with hip dysplasia and severe hip dysplasia, we are able to find in this country people who have very good breeding programs for hips and who are also getting dogs with good type, and conscientious breeders who will not breed dogs with bad hips. We have a whole new different set of problems that have come up and that has to do with cancer or elbows, or whatever other problems that we have that may or may not be genetically linked. But I think that there was a standard set that was fairly good. I mean, people would say, "Code of ethics doesn't mean anything if you don't enforce it." And that is true, but I think there are a lot of people who look at that code of ethics and said, "This is a guideline for us and we should stick to our guideline if we have any sense of moral perpetuity whatsoever." And people did. And I think that that set forth a fairly good standard ... I mean, there will always be people who are going to breed dogs with major faults, or who are not going to go along with the guideline, but I do think that with the gene pool people were pretty conscientious about breeding good dogs years ago. I'm not sure that that standard still holds true. I haven't really focused on it a lot lately myself. (laughter) It's not a priority in my life to worry about what other people are doing with their breeding programs right now. I go to the National Specialty and there are a lot of things that I see that I don't like, whether it be in the presentation of the dogs in their grooming, whether it be in their lack of type. I think that the progression of the breed is that the dogs today are far better in their movement than they were twenty years ago. That we've come a long way in improving movement. I think the dogs today, in general, are far more unified in their type. You'd go into a ring twenty years ago and you'd look at those dogs and say, "Other than color, are these dogs all from the same breed?" We had curly coats and no coats and straight coats. We'd have tails straight up over the backs. We'd have tails tucked under the bellies. We'd have heads that looked like Collie heads and we'd have Saint Bernard heads. We still have a wide variety of heads. But we'd have dogs that were 20 inches and we'd have dogs that were 28 inches. We still see some of the extremes, but for the most part we see something in the middle more than what we used to see. So as far as evolution is concerned, we've come to a middle ground and closer to the standard in that sense. If I were to say, "Do we have lots of outstanding dogs?" I don't think so. I think that as far as those extremes are concerned, we don't have lousy dogs in the ring anymore where you have to go, "Ooh, gag me." That dog shouldn't be in the ring; every once in a while there is one, but those dogs are sold for pets. I mean, it used to be that all dogs went into the showring whether they were pets or not because if you wanted a champion, you had to get the numbers together, so everybody went into the ring. But on the other hand, we just don't see those really lousy dogs anymore that just can't walk, or they don't look like a Bernese Mountain Dog or whatever. They look like Bernese Mountain Dogs when you see them in the ring, but on the other hand, we don't see the outstanding quality either on the other extreme. I mean, it's very rare that I go to a show and say, "Wow! That's a great dog." I might see flashy dogs in there. There might be beautifully groomed dogs in there. There might be dogs that will place Best in Show and first in Groups, but they're placing Best in Show and first in Group, in my opinion, not because they are spectacular Bernese Mountain Dogs but because of the politics in the dog showring.

Do you want to talk a little bit about politics and why dogs are put up? Do you think advertising influences the judges?

Yes, I do. I think that advertising influences judges in an enormous amount. If you see a dog advertised over and over and over again, regardless of how intelligent you are, you're going to believe that that dog is the proper dog. That has to do with not just advertising, but putting a professional handler on the end of the lead. "Boy if that handler is handling it, it's got to be a good dog." And some people can really handle dogs beautifully, and you'd never know that the dog ever had any fault. I'd like to give credit to most judges that they are in fact human and can see some of the faults of the dogs. When a judge judges a group of dogs, let's say you have five Bernese Mountain Dogs in the ring or ten, the job of the judge on any given day is to pick the best dog in the ring. There are clauses of "let's withhold ribbons for lack of merit," but you very seldom see that happen. In fact, if a dog wins a ribbon for Best of Breed, it does not necessarily mean that it is a perfect Bernese Mountain Dog. And if a dog gets major points and major points again because it is the best Bernese Mountain Dog in the ring on that day, that does not mean it is necessarily a good Bernese Mountain Dog. A championship, in my opinion, does not necessarily mean anything. You have to look at the dog. You can't look at the pedigree and the title and say, "Hey, it has a championship, therefore it must be a beautiful dog." And I think that is one of the fallacies of the dog show thing. I've always shown dogs. I enjoy the spirit of dogs and I enjoy winning. I hate losing; I'm a human being. I especially hate losing when I think that I've got the best dog in the ring, but I do think that if I were to get out there, I hate losing when I'm losing because of dog show politics and I'm not going to be naive enough to say that dog show politics don't come into the picture, because judges are influenced by advertising, judges are influenced by handlers, and judges are influenced by slickness. Like it or not, a dog that is groomed and scissored and fluffed and chalked on its chest – one of the things about Bernese Mountain Dogs is its distinctive markings – when that white is white and black is a shiny black, that's a really subtle way of making a dog look gorgeous regardless of the type of dog that is underneath of it. Regardless of the structure, regardless of the head, you can make a dog look spectacular just by making its coat shiny and its "white" white and chalking. We ALL know that you're not supposed to do that, but having been on the judging end, I can tell you I have taken my hands off of dogs and have felt the silicone in my hands. I've seen the chalk at the tables; you're not supposed to do that, but your dog looks spectacular in the ring and is going to do a lot of winning. Overgrooming, overscissoring to me is a terrible disservice to the breed. They should be a natural beautiful dog, and they are a natural beautiful dog. And why we can't just go into the ring and say, "This is a naturally beautiful dog." Let's look at the dog without having to cheat. It's not cheating, but it is cheating. Shifting. Manipulating. It's not cheating, it's manipulating the judge. It kind of makes me sad.

What do you think can be done to change that?

I think judges' education can be done to change that. And I think that that is a really difficult job to do. The dimensions of dog shows are so difficult. I think that judges need to be educated as to why this is a Bernese Mountain Dog, what is the purpose of this dog? Is this dog a Golden Retriever that is supposed to be out running in the fields or is this a dog who is supposed to be able to pull a cart? And, having been involved on the judging end of a draft trial and being very disappointed in the lack of muscling of Bernese Mountain Dogs, because most people have them as pets – no they are not supposed to look like Golden Retrievers, but they should be able to pull a cart! You get into dog shows and conformation shows and a lot of the dogs that win are the dogs that move the best. And I agree that a dog that moves well should probably place appropriately, but that dog should move such that that dog should be able to pull a cart and have the muscling and the build to pull a cart.

Ch. Shepherd's Patch Elise CD, TD.

Are you saying that just because it moves well, doesn't mean there is a muscle beneath it that would indicate?

Right. Or the movement might be good movement for a Golden Retriever, but it is lousy movement for a Bernese Mountain Dog. And too often judges get into the ring and they sort of see this generic dog as to how this dog should move and don't take in all of the characteristics of a Bernese Mountain Dog that make it a Bernese Mountain Dog. That's really hard for me to verbalize I guess partly because I've seen ... Well, Dina was at the very small end of the standard heightwise. She was 22 1/2 inches tall and yet she could pull a cart like no other dog that I ever had. She could pull a cart loaded with wood up the hill. She was a strong, well-built dog with the stamina to do it. I've had other dogs, and I've seen dogs, who'd take a look at that hill and say, "I can't do that." And yet, Switzerland is not a flat country. (laughter)

On the other hand, if a dog doesn't move well, could there still be muscle underneath?

Yes. I think so. A lot of times people will brag about how big their dog is and it just means that you get on the scale and it's fat. I mean, I can brag about how big I am and that doesn't mean I'm in good shape. I can get on the scale too. (laughter)

You talked some about educating the judges. What are some of your suggestions maybe to help the judges. I'm assuming you are talking about all-breed judges?

Yes. I'm talking about all-breed judges or even breed judges. And I think that one of the difficulties of that, and I've been a participant at any number of judges' seminars, at a judges' seminar, part of the problem is that so often it's sort of like a requirement for school. Okay, you've got to take biology. So you stick it out through that biology course and you want to be a French major. So it's like, "Okay, I'm going to go in there. I want to judge Bernese Mountain Dogs cause I want it on my resume and I want to be hired at some dog show to be able to judge x number of breeds, because if I breed lots of breeds, I have more chances of going to more dog shows." Right? If I just judged Bernese Mountain Dogs or if I just judged Papillons, or if I just judged Boston Terriers, no one is going to hire me. But if I judged the whole Working Group, I've got a better chance of going. So, you want to judge the Working Group, then you have to add x number of dogs in the Working Group that you can judge. And in order to judge those breeds, if you want to judge the Bernese Mountain Dog, you have to attend the seminar. And I can't tell you the number of seminars I've sat through where those people are just putting in their time at the seminar. They can care less. They have their own plan, and they are not there to learn about the Bernese Mountain Dog. I don't know how you get past that to say, "Listen, don't you have my breed at interest? Don't you realize what you are doing?" I can't go to the judges' seminars anymore because I want to grab those folks by the scruff of their neck and shake them and say, "You are doing my breed a terrible disservice by chocking up your own points so that you can do something for you own ego by going to more dog shows." The Bernese Mountain Dog Club has a problem in that we do not have that many breeder judges. And I think that that's where we have our biggest fault, and anybody outside of the breed will immediately turn to me and say, "Why don't you judge your breed?" I do, I judge it at matches. I've judged it at Sweepstakes and I'm going to be judging Futurity this year. I'm not interested though. I'm past that point in my life where dogs are my priority. It's just not worth it to me anymore. And I think, unfortunately, there are a lot of people who are very knowledgeable about the breed who are at the same point in their lives. And that, to be critical of myself, is a disservice to the breed. I'm not interested in going through all of the rigamarole the AKC puts you through. How many litters have you had? I've had six. Does six make me an expert? No, not by those numbers.

Does twenty make you an expert?

Does having 100 litters make me an expert? No. You might be an expert in whelping puppies, but it doesn't make you an expert in what your breed is.

Has your change in priorities been more of a result of having had children or because as you said, you don't want to go through the rigamarole? What do you attribute it more to?

Both. This may have to do with having kids ... No, this doesn't have anything to do with having kids. I didn't get married until I was 34 so I was single for a long time, and I have always been an independent kind of person. I've always been taught that my decisions were my decisions and I've had wonderful support of family in whatever those decisions have been. In 1979 I was breeding dogs and I had six dogs at the time. I was showing. It was 1979 that I got this UD. I mean I REALLY was focused on my dogs. We were just starting to have specialties and I was really focused on obedience. I was instrumental in forming a local obedience club, so I was training a couple of dogs in obedience at the same time and they were at several different levels. I was tracking, I was carting and I was showing in conformation. I was into the full dog trip and having a couple of litters. If you only have a couple of bitches, you can't have lots of litters. The litter business was not necessarily my priority, but it was part of the whole scene.

My veterinarian knew me quite well because I was in there once a week. If anything showed up in my dogs, I had to have it taken care of. If there was a limp it was taken care of. If there was a scratch, if the dog sneezed, we were running to my veterinarian. I built his entire new wing on his hospital. He said to me one day, "Would you be interested in going to a medical mission to Haiti?" And I said, "That sounds interesting and it sounds like the kind of thing that I would like to do." He knew about my church involvement. We didn't go to the same church, but he knew the rector at my church and he kind of knew me. He knew me very well, actually. He said, "Would you be interested in going?" And I said, "No, I'm having a litter of puppies at that time." And the next year came around and he said, "Are you interested in going?" And I said, "Nope, I've got two litters of puppies coming. I can't go, I have to take care of these dogs." Then the third year came around, and 1979 was the first year that he went and he said, "I've had a life-changing experience going to a Third World country." He never gave up on me ever. He came back and he said, "Would you like to go to Haiti this year?" And I said, "Well, I'm not having a litter of puppies this year. Gee, I probably could go for two weeks and I could afford it." I was also into breeding and raising sheep at the time. I lived with my mother and that was a full-time job for me. Lambs weren't coming quite yet; they weren't due until March, and he was going in January. Which is a nice time to get out of here. That experience essentially changed my life.

How so?

Because when I considered where my priorities in my life had been – dogs, I realized that the amount of money that I put into my dogs in one year was to satisfy my own personal joy, my own happiness, my own hedonistic qualities. And then I went to a Third World country where I met people that I thought were probably the most loving people that I have ever met, the most spirit-filled people that I have ever met; I received so much from those people. I kind of went down thinking that I was going to be a missionary, that I was going to go down there and help them work on their problems. I worked on a dental team. My veterinarian knew that I was going to be good because he knew that I could deal with blood and guts and prolapsed uteruses and stillborn puppies and dead lambs and muck and barn crap and all that kind of stuff that you have to go through when you are a farmer and when you're involved with animals and bad smells. Bad smells don't bother me, except when I'm pregnant. (laughter) I could get past that and he knew that that wasn't going to bother me, that I could get past Third World conditions and see the beauty of those people. Those people are my friends now. Those people are my best friends and I no longer see them as "those poor Haitians," I see them as my best friends. And I have, in the meantime, developed a real relationship with a community in Haiti that is far more important to me than spending $100 a weekend on dog shows. I can now feed and clothe and educate a child for $120 a year. And so, the money that I can put in, and the time and the energy, that was a lot of it, to go in and really make a difference in peoples' lives where it's going to make their lives better. I can't explain that to dog people. I go to a National Specialty and I look at the amount of money that goes into a National Specialty, holy cow! I mean it blows my mind that people aren't ... I can give a kid sanitation for $50 – I can give him a latrine. That is a real leap of energy for me that is very difficult for me to explain to dog people. My dogs are very important to me, but I think, as I said earlier to you before the tape came on, my interest in dog shows is when I can go to them and I can scratch the surface and I can find the human beings in those people. And I have a lot of friends who know how I feel about Haiti and how I feel about Third World countries, and who are very supportive of me in those efforts. Even if they only say, "Keep it up," or "How do you feel about the political situation in Haiti," or "Gee, it must be tough that you can't go now because of the political situation." I need those strokes from dog show people who say, "Yes, I enjoy my dogs." But I also know that those friends have other interests. That they also have other vocations in their lives besides dogs. I look at becoming full-time in dogs, and I can't do it. This world is a "!?!?!?!" mess and a good deal of the reason why it is like that is because a lot of us just keep on going and say, "I can't do that. I can't help starving children because I've got a litter of puppies coming." (laughter) I did that for a couple of years. It's a blessing that he didn't give up on me. I'm not saying that I'm any great missionary, I'm not, but I can say that I've done something a little more with my life than getting the first title and the biggest title and the most title. That's just not as important to me.

How many times have you been down since then?

I've been down to Haiti probably ten times. That's kind of like, "How many champions have you bred?" I went in '81, '82, and then I got married. And that was a reason for me getting married. I got married and I came home from my second trip and my future husband said, "I really think that you are a wonderful person and I love you. Not because of your interest in your dogs, but because of your compassion for other people. I love that part about you and I'll take the dogs, too." He does love the dogs, but when he is home, the dogs are outside and when he is not home, the dogs are in the house. So, that whole aspect of my life has taken priority. I wish the five phone calls that I get about dogs a week, or six or ten that I get about dogs, were people who would call me up and say, "I'm interested in helping poor people." Can you help me help poor people?" Or, "I'm interested in what you do in Haiti. Can you tell me what you do in Haiti?" The whole thing about Haiti is that I really see them ministering to me as I minister to them. They are financially very poor people, there is no doubt about it. They are starving to death. They have no resources. They have no government, they live in oppression. They are as far from this spot right here as you and I can possibly get, in all sorts of ways. And yet, because of whatever their lives are, they have just opened up all sorts of new insights to me into the beauty of life.

Do you ever do any local stuff as far as helping the homeless in Milwaukee, etc.?

Yes. Milwaukee has its own problems and its own set of problems and my whole context of what I do is within the Episcopal church. What developed was that this first group of people that I went to Haiti with was ecumenical and Rotarian. It was church related and then there were people who were Rotarians. Those are not the exclusive groups. There were some people who were Christian Rotarians, some people who were just Christians, and then there were some people who were just Rotarians. But it was a mixed bag of people, and after my second trip down there we decided that the resources of the Episcopal church in the southern part of Wisconsin, the diocese of Milwaukee which covers the southern third of Wisconsin, were good enough that we could develop our own program to help Haiti. So we've developed our own little project with one village, which is different than the village that I went to. We've helped them in supporting the school, a clinic, a church, agricultural programs, water programs, and all sorts of things. And it's been pretty much a model figure and the strength of that is, "Why am I not living in Haiti?" I'm not living in Haiti because I feel that what I have to do is come back and say to people here that there is real reward in identifying with people with problems and pain. Sometimes that is financial problems. Sometimes that is problems with abuse within a family. Wherever that pain is, there is an importance for us as far as Christians to understand people, to emphathize with people, to work together with each other. And I'm not saying that we need to convert people. You know, I don't know where you come from on the religious scale whatsoever, but that's not my purpose. I may have focus myself as to where my religion is, but what we can do is use the religious experiences that those of us who have been to Haiti have used and come back to Milwaukee with inner-city people, and say, "This is how we've done it in Haiti." Our primary philosophy in Haiti has been to go to Haitians and say, "What are your problems? What do you see as your problem, and what do you expect to do about it?" Now that gets to a big word like empowerment or enablement and those are words that get overused, but essentially that is what it is. And that is to say, "What is your problem? Identify your own problem instead of sitting and pissing and moaning about it. Identify really what the problem is and then let's explore ways that you can solve those problems." And that works very well in a country like Haiti. You go to the people and they say, "Well, I'm poor." "Well, why are you poor and what is the effect of that poverty?" "Well, the effects of that poverty are my children are dying of malnutrition, and I don't have any water, any sanitation and we don't have any education." "Well, what do we do to solve this? We build a cistern, we put on a new roof so that we can collect water? We build you a latrine?" "I don't have the money to build a latrine, it takes cement to build up the walls. I can't just dig a hole." "Oh, let's see how we can do that." It's a cooperative effort and that reward has been back here. It is so far removed from the dog world that I go into culture shock. I go into more culture shock going to dog shows now than I do going to Haiti and coming back. And that's a strong statement especially from somebody who has lived dogs for 30 or 35 years. And it is a culture shock for me now, to have a different perspective on dogs and the dog world. So now you can close your mouth. It's okay. (laughter)

You never know what you'll find.

No you don't, and that's great. I say to my husband that I'm going off to the National Specialty and you'll never know what you're going to find there.

So despite all of the stuff ...?

In spite of all the superficial stuff, I still enjoy seeing a beautiful Bernese Mountain Dog. I still enjoy seeing all of those wagging tails. I still just get a thrill out of it. I guess I just wish that people put as much energy into world problems as they do into dogs.

Have you ever given any thought of using the dogs in helping people maybe here in Milwaukee?

You mean like the therapy dog kind of thing? I have thought about it, but I haven't had the energy to do it. For all the obedience training that I have ever done...

(Phone call)

I'm not one to say that other people aren't doing other things that aren't meaningful. I was so focused on dogs that I had forgotten what life's priorities were and I think that that is not only dogs, that's any sport. That's American society. If we want to wonder why we are in such trouble, it's because we don't help eachother. So, it's not my problem; my problem is that I want to go out and have a good time.

Does making the Top Ten or Twenty mean anything?

Not to me.

Do you always show your own dogs?

Yes, I do.

Have you ever handled for other people as a favor or professionally?

I have handled for other people. I don't necessarily like handling for other people because I think that it is important for someone to handle their own dog. I read something by someone that said, "Oh, I'm really hooked on dog shows and my handler is ..." Some big-name handler. Well, that person doesn't really know what hooked on dog shows is. She is hooked on having her dog win. She doesn't know what the thrill is when you go in and do it yourself.

So you could say that it made you happy to have the dogs and to win, and now it just shifted. That something else gives you satisfaction, but the dogs are still there.

Yes. It's just a matter of prioritizing. It doesn't mean that the dogs aren't in my life anymore, it's just a matter of priorities. And children also come into the picture, and my husband. Families have that way of coming into a picture and the health of the family has a way of screaming up and saying, "Mom, I don't want to go to another dog show." Or, "I don't want to go to a dog show at all, Mom."

Was it usually a family affair?

No. It was me. My daughter is the kind of daughter who is also very independent. I was blessed or cursed with a child who follows in my own footsteps, and so she is always sort of running off to pet a dog here or pet a dog there. I'm just afraid of losing her. She really doesn't know what is good for her. She is older now so I do like to take her, and she is very good with the dogs. She is excellent with the dogs. She has leash trained my dogs for me, she's exercised the dogs for me, and she loves to train the dogs and work with the dogs. I think I'd rather have her have Haiti or other things be a priority in her life instead of dogs. I don't mean to say that I don't want dogs to be important to her because she does know how important they are.

For instance, the bitch that I own is a beautiful bitch, but she is dysplastic. So she'll never have puppies, she's been spayed. Allison always says, "Why don't we have puppies?" "Allison, that is not an important thing in my life to have a dog that one can breed so that the children can experience puppies. My philosophy never has been."

If she were to decide that she wanted to have a dog when she turns eleven and picks out a dog, would you let her and help her out if that's what she decides she wants to do?

Yeah, I think by an age of reason then you sort of say okay. We have to deal with the prenuptial agreement that we have as many cats in the house as dogs in the house. Unfortunately, one of these dogs here either has to go or dies, and I've never had a dog that has left me other than through death. My dogs always live with me. That all has to factor in; I'm a controlling mother.

Would you recommend joining a local breed club, national breed club and/or an all-breed club?

I think that those clubs have a great deal of value. I'm not currently active in my club, but I really do think that they have a lot of educational and social value. It's a good way for the people to get together and to get to know each other. And I think in that social value, I've seen this with people who just go to the dog shows for the thrill of winning, they don't get to know the people around them. A dog club will give you that opportunity to come together to share and care and be with each other and understand each other as human beings. I think that part of the joy of the sport is knowing other people, not just knowing the other dogs. When somebody else's dog dies, you can say that you know how they feel to have their dog die. If you just go to dog shows and you don't know people, you can't share those feelings. I know that clubs can kill people; they burnout, they get involved, they get active and then they get used to the point of burnout, and I certainly have been through that with dog clubs. But I think they also have a really strong social value and educational value. I've learned a lot from the people in my all-breed club. When you've belonged to a club for an extended period of time, you go through people's lives more than just a superficial meeting at a dog show.

Is there an AKC video in this breed? Is it a good one?

Yes, there is an AKC video in this breed and it's okay. It suffers from the problem that they've had a hard time finding the OUTSTANDING Bernese Mountain Dog to put in it.

Is there adequate literature available in the breed?

I think the Bernese Mountain Dog Club has done a superb job in its monthly newsletters. I think almost to a fault that there is almost too much to read about the breed. But if you want to find it, it is there about dogs in general and about the breed specifically.

If I were to say anything about the club in general, I think it's been very good about looking at the total aspect of the dog and not just on the wonderful qualities of the dog. Part of our major problem in the breed right now is cancer, and that's like trying to solve AIDS. It's a real problem for us and we're not big enough to be able to cure cancer. If we were, it would be a marvelous thing.

What kind of cancer?

Breed specific. It's called malignant histiocytosis. I've had any number of dogs die of an early death from it and it's something that was relatively recently discovered. That doesn't mean it hasn't existed for a long time, and I think that there is a whole chapter for your people to be aware of. There is a study that has been going on with the University of California at Davis and the University of Michigan to try to pinpoint it to see whether it is genetically related, trying to decide whether this is an autoimmune problem with this breed. Is there something in Bernese Mountain Dogs that just says I can't fight this kind of cancer? It's a real heartbreaker because some dogs die at a very early age.

There are thoughts that it's genetically related. On the other hand if I look at dogs that I've had that just ... you can't breed a dog for longevity. You can't say, "Okay, I'm going to take this dog that lives til ten and breed it." It's past its breeding age. So you can't necessarily breed for longevity. So, that's the heartbreak of the breed, the cancer and the short life span right now.

Saying, "Well, I'll go to such-and-such breeder because they have dogs that live a long time," isn't going to guarantee anybody anything. I think it is a breed-wide problem.

What advice would you give to breeders who are just starting out?

My advice would be if there is a local dog club to find out what their activities are. I would take a long time in looking for a dog. I'd say unless there were some opportunity that was really pretty obvious to me right up front ... Let's say that this person does have some dog knowledge. I usually ask if they've been involved with another breed of dogs so that you kind of get to know a level. I would advise somebody not to be limited on area. If it means going to Switzerland to find the dog that you want, go to Switzerland. If you really want to get into breeding a good Bernese Mountain Dog, you need to educate yourself as to what a good Bernese Mountain Dog is. That means not just going to the local dog show and seeing what's winning at the local dog show, though a local dog show is going to be helpful. The breed has gotten to be popular enough that there are certain dog shows that are large enough so that you can see a large sampling of dogs. Observe at dog shows, formulating in your own mind what a good Bernese Mountain Dog looks like, because unless you have some sort of ideal to aim for, you can just go out and buy a puppy. The problem is to find a breeder who is going to supply you with a puppy that is that ideal. No breeder really likes somebody who says, "Well, I want a Bernese Mountain Dog that has the perfect head, the perfect temperament, the perfect topline, moves beautifully, has perfect tail carriage, and has the right coat texture." They would say, "PLEASE, can I have a dog like that? When you find that dog, would you let me know? I'll pay thousands of dollars for that dog." You have to go to a breeder who is those kinds of things. If you don't like what a breeder is doing, go someplace else. And that takes a lot of effort and a lot of work, and you may not even come up with something, but I think that it takes a long time rather than saying, "It's March, I want a puppy by May." Well, if you want a puppy by May, you'll get one by May, but it may not be the quality of dog you want. So I think what one would have to do is say, "I'm going to take a long time to examine." That's a pretty simplistic kind of thing, but it has all sorts of difficult implications in it. If I were somebody who was looking for a Bernese Mountain Dog, I would have to say that the people who charge the highest prices aren't necessarily the people with the best dogs. The people that live in my area may or may not have the best dogs; I'd have to find that out by myself. I personally believe that the dogs in the Midwest are really good quality, in general. There is a really conscientious group of breeders in the Midwest. But if somebody says, "I want a dog from Colorado," I would tell them to go to Colorado to see the dogs. Figure out what your priorities are. The priorities that you have for obedience dogs. There are people out there who are breeding GOOD obedience dogs. Sound, wonderful obedience dogs. Type-wise maybe they aren't. That's what my ideal of a Bernese Mountain Dog would be. I always tell people to check out hips, elbows, temperament, whatever, and take them into consideration and evaluate whatever is in the pedigree.

So the pedigree can be relatively trustworthy?

Yes and no. I went to a lot of effort at one point in my life to take the dogs that have received OFA certification and do their pedigrees, and the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America still does that in their yearbook. And I will never forget seeing the first dog that came through who was OFA certified, came from OFA certified parents, and came from four OFA certified grandparents, and you look at the dog and it has the worst rear in the world. And it's kind of the, "Oh, gee, so what does this all mean?" Sure pedigrees are very valuable in a lot of instances, but you have to know cross generational sort of things such as what the brothers are like. It's a lot of work and a lot of secrets are out there. How many people really know of the bitch or the stud dog they are using what the littermates turned out to be like in that litter? Not me or anyone unless they are a breeder who kept a very close eye on what was going on. People who are new to the breed and don't know many generations in particular wouldn't know. There are a lot of people who are breeding very good dogs, but they don't know much about the dimensions and the generations. A lot of people have never seen pictures of the grandparents or great-grandparents of their dogs and that came with dealing with a breed in which imports are still important to our gene pool. If you look back two generations in a lot of dogs, you can still find an import. That means that we don't know much about the rest of the dogs in that pedigree.

That's a soapbox that some people might want to get onto. Actually, there are a number of people who are just dedicated to importing dogs from Switzerland because in their hearts they believe that the Swiss have the best dogs.

Do you think the Swiss have better dogs?

I think it's six on one hand, half dozen the other from what I've seen of Swiss dogs. Why should the Swiss export their best dogs to this country never to be seen again? So I think that there are some breeders in Switzerland who don't want to send their best dogs over here. Why should they? Unless it's money, they want their best dogs themselves. It's like any breeder. I've had puppies come through my litters that I've said that I wasn't letting the dog go because it was a nice dog. I'm holding on to this dog. You keep the best for yourself if you are really truly interested in breeding. So I think that we have had wonderful type come from Switzerland and I think that when they do their judging, their judges are much more concerned about type and what a Bernese Mountain Dog as an overall picture looks like. For whatever I've said about all of the judges, I think we have far better moving dogs and we should try to combine the best of those two dogs.

Is there a difference between the standards in Switzerland and here?

Yeah, and that's a good point. I'm not familiar with what the current Swiss standard is. I have worked on the standard in the United States and I think that is worthy of note here. Our first standard was approved in 1937 and at that time the standard in Switzerland said, in describing the coloring of the dog, which is very specific, that a small white patch on the back of the neck is preferred. Maybe it didn't say preferred, maybe it said accepted. The Swiss then went through a whole period where they really decided that they didn't want dogs that had rings around their necks, like a Collie would have a ring around its neck. So a Bernese Mountain Dog with a ring around its neck was not a desirable dog. It was not a desired marking. They decided what happened with that little patch at the back of the neck was perhaps an extension of the gene that either carried the blaze going too far back into the back of the neck or from the ring around the neck. And so the Swiss in the course of the years came to the point where the small white patch at the back of the neck is a fault. Now, that's in a period of about 50 or 40 years during which our standard did not change at all. So you have a standard here that says that the white patch is a desirable characteristic and in Switzerland the white patch is not desirable at all and is considered a fault. So when the decision came up in the '80's, we couldn't go from saying that the patch is desired to the patch is undesired. You just couldn't do that. (laughter)

You wouldn't have any dogs in shows.

Right. I don't think that the patch was desired, but the patch was there. It was acceptable and you can't go from acceptable to be undesired as a fault. So, we got around it, and the AKC was very helpful in saying this. The AKC said two things, one is that your standard should reflect the country of origin of the dog as closely as possible. Secondly, it's to describe the dog in as positive terms as possible. So when you describe the dog, you say that the dog's skull should be flat and broad. This is just an example and I'm not even quoting ours. You don't say that the dog's head shouldn't be narrow and pointy. You describe it in a positive term so that you have a positive image of what the dog should be, not a negative image of what the dog shouldn't be. This dog shouldn't look like a Collie, this dog should look like a Bernese Mountain Dog. Therefore, you need to describe what a Bernese Mountain Dog looks like. And we had some problems in doing that. What we came up with colors and markings was to describe what the proper markings were and then to say, "Any deviations from those standard markings or ideal markings should be faulted to the extent of the deviation." So that when you read that you are kind of going to say, "Say what?" It means that if the dog has a little small patch back there, it is a small fault. If the dog has a great big patch back there, three or four inches in diameter, that's a big fault. That's kind of where we are at. And so, linking up the two countries is kind of hard when they move along a little faster than what we do. Their organization works differently from how our organization works. We could not go from the 1937 standard to the standard in the early '80's and make giant leaps and changes. We had to do it gradually because you can't do that to a breed genetically. So the next standard tightened things up a little more. We had a big variation in sizes; we tightened up that sizing. A bitch originally could be anywhere from 21 to 26 inches. That's a big difference. So we've tightened it up by raising up the lower end of it. That's a gradual process, so we don't necessarily have an ideal standard yet, one that is really specific, and that's the weakness of our standard. There are people who look at our standard and say "This doesn't describe much of anything. How can I get to know what a Bernese Mountain Dog is from this?" The standard is too vague, but we also couldn't make it really specific. I mean, look at the Great Dane standard, it goes on for pages and pages and pages because it has evolved over time. We're slow in that evolution of our standard.

So it's in the process though?

Yes. And that just takes time in the evolution of the breed before you can either make the standard match the dog or the dog match the standard. If you were breeding all dogs that were 21 inches tall because they were in the standard, and then all of a sudden you say that all bitches have to be 23 inches tall, you've cut a lot of bitches out that were probably very acceptable specimens of the breed other than their size. So you have to make sure that the bigger bitches are the acceptable. You're not just breeding for size, you're breeding for a good specimen of the breed.

Up to this point is there anything that you want to clarify or go back and expound upon? Or something that we may not have touched on that you'd like to.

No. I don't want anymore phone calls about dogs.

I think I made my soapbox pretty clear, which is not most people's soapbox.

You mentioned that one of the things that you like in the dogs is the people behind the dogs. Are there any other benefits?

Without hesitation, the dogs themselves. As far as I'm concerned this is the most wonderful breed that ever came upon the earth. I mean, the Dachshund lady and the Terrier lady probably all tell you that, too, but they just have a marvelous temperament when you find a good Bernese Mountain Dog. They are just extremely loyal dogs. They are pretty dogs. They are a dog. I mean, you look at that and you say, "Now, that's a dog. That's not a mutt, that's not a toy, that's a dog." And they are really very easy to live with; extremely easy to live with for the most part. Enormously lovable animals. I don't think that the answer is to assume they're like chocolate. When you have one, you want another one, and another one. And I've seen people get like this. I never want to live with six Bernese Mountain Dogs again. And I understand that even three is more dogs than I want. I'm very happy. It puts a crimp on one's breeding program if you're really into "having a breeding program." You probably need to have twenty dogs going through your house. I love having two dogs which I can devote an enormous amount of time to. Even these two dogs get jealous of one another. They are always pushing each other aside. So, I'm glad I don't have more than that demanding my attention. I think that that is important for some people to understand. Just because you like one, doesn't mean you have to have six. I like having two because I think that they do give each other companionship. That dimension works well in my life, having two dogs in my life. I'm very lonely with just one dog around. It's too quiet or something, or the other dog is depressed. We all need some sort of alter ego in our lives and I don't intend to be the alter ego for a dog. (laughter)

What have been the drawbacks, if any?

Absolutely the heartbreak of losing a dog. The pain of death, without a question. That one is just BIG. Losing a dog is horribly painful. I think the other drawback is the temptation to be focused on dogs and not focused on the important issues of life in general. You know, any number of times that I've seen my family suffer or other families suffer from somebody's focusing on dogs and saying that this is important. And it can be just as sick as alcoholism or gambling or ... Those are the two major drawbacks aside from the fact that I have nothing white in my wardrobe. (laughter) I'll live without living in white.

Maybe that's why they have the White German Shepherd now?

Well, then you don't have anything black in your wardrobe either. I talk to Samoyed people and they don't wear dark clothes. So choose your poison.

Has it been worth it?

Absolutely. One hundred percent. I've learned an awful lot from my experience with dogs and my experience with dog people, which I wouldn't give up for the world. My dogs probably prepared me better than anything in my entire life experience for being a parent. Not that I have perfect children, they are far from perfect, but I have gone through my own progression in dog training. And thank heavens it happened with the dogs and not with the children of trying to beat them into submission. You know, "HEEL, STAY, DOWN, COME!" And getting absolutely nowhere with my scores. My dogs now whom I don't train in a structure, I call them now and they are there like crazy because they know I love them and I am not going to beat them into training because I love them. I think that whole philosophy has been such a good experience to me with my children and people in general, especially my work in Haiti, if you want to get something done. I try not to go to people and say, "Look at these poor starving children. They are dying because you're so greedy and you're so callous not to pay any attention to them." And guilt, guilt, guilt. I'm going to lay a guilt trip on you because you're not doing your social job as a human being and I'm going to make you feel awfully guilty about the fact that there are starving children in Haiti. I could do that. That is not my method in going to talking to people about it. I go to people and say, "You know, those people are my friends and I love them. And because I love them, I'd like to introduce you to my friends. And if you got to know my friends, the way I've gotten to know my friends, you'd want to help them because you like them so much. This is really a good thing." It's a slow way of working it and a lot of people don't respond. You get a lot of people who don't work unless they have fear or guilt put into them, but in the long run you're far more effective by working from a position of loving and caring. And my dogs have taught me that. Nobody wants to go do something that they are going to feel awful about or guilty about. They want to go do things that they feel good about. I credit my dogs for teaching me that.

Ch. Shepherd's Patch Auntie Al CD.

You're married and have two kids?

Yes. I got married when I was 34 and I'm almost 46 now. I have two children who are nine and a half and seven. My children's responsibilities for the dogs are essentially that they feed the dogs, but other than enjoying the dog, they don't have much involvement in the dogs. My daughter likes to walk the dogs and she does enjoy going to the training classes with me, but I don't push it one way or the other. I figure that's their choice. If they are more interested in other things then so be it, I'm not going to force any of that on them. They are good human beings and have their own interests.

What are some of your other interests besides Haiti and Bernese Mountain Dogs?

I like to garden, I like to read. I've had kind of a past interest in raising sheep. I have a whole part of my identity that says, "Sheep, spinning, weaving, knitting handcrafts," but I haven't done a lot of that since the children came. My mother, because of her age, sold her flock of sheep last summer. So right at the moment I'm going through my own little identity crisis saying, "I should be getting phone calls about lambs." I can smell lambs in the air. For the last 22 years that's been a part of my life, sheep breeding, and I'm having kind of my own identity crisis about it right now, knowing that there is no shearing now. I usually did shearing the second week of March, and here we are in the second week of March and I miss that. I miss those smells when I go to my mother's barn and I don't hear those sheep talking to me anymore. I've had that part of my past, but it's not there anymore. I don't know if it ever will be again. Right at the moment my life is pretty much focused on Haiti and my children. Now I'm the quintessential chauffeur, driving here and driving there. Hobbies do not come screaming into my life at the moment. I've had lots of them and varied ones over the years, but nothing that ...

This is a very beautiful house. How long have you lived here?

I've lived here since I was married in 1982. This is my husband's house, his family house, so it was built in the '30's probably.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in northern Wisconsin. I went to school in Washington, DC for a short period of time. I went to college in Wisconsin. I lived in San Francisco for a couple of years, but basically Wisconsin is my home.

What did you study when you were in school?

German and I have a degree in library science. I haven't used the German much, but it has helped me in the translation of pedigrees and in reading Swiss magazines on dogs.

Have you ever gone to Switzerland?

Yes. I've been there twice. Once for a fairly long extended period of time in 1968. I had a friend who lived there and went to visit her for about six weeks.

Did you bring any dogs back?

Actually, I think I did. I bought a dog when I was there. I left from London so it was a little complicated getting him back. He didn't come back by way of London because he would have had to go through quarantine. My dad was in London at the time. I didn't leave from Switzerland, but eventually the dog did come back.

I have imported several dogs from Switzerland over the course of the years, with mixed results, basically, in the late '60's and early '70's. I think now if I were to buy a dog, I probably would not go to Switzerland because I think that there are fairly good dogs here. I have nothing against the Swiss dogs, it's just a long way away. (laughter) And I think that if one were to buy a dog from Switzerland, one should go through that same piece of advice I gave a minute ago about knowing who you are buying from. I don't know those people in Switzerland anymore. I know people in the United States and I have a little better feel about who I am going to and what's going on. That's pretty unrelated to anything, but ...

Anything else?

I don't think so. It's a lot of emotions and a lot of knowledge to pack 35 years into however many hours and be able to focus on all of it.

Thank you very much.

Thank you. It's been fun. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks With
Carol and Marty Lockhart
CAR-MAR'S
Santa Rosa, California

This interview was conducted at the home of Carol and Marty Lockhart in March of 1994 by Jena Lutz.

How long have you been in Bernese Mountain Dogs?

Marty: We started in the Mountain Dogs in 1967 when we got our first one. We got a bitch from one of the very few breeders on the West Coast at that time. You had to look at that time to find one.

Did you have any other breeds prior to Bernese?

Marty: Yes, we had German Shepherds prior to that, and most of those we used in obedience work, which worked very well. We didn't do too much conformation showing with Shepherds, because there were so many and it was not worth the effort to put into it, so we used them just for obedience work.

What attracted you to the Bernese Mountain Dogs?

Carol: A friend of ours had given us a copy of the *National Geographic*, and in it were pictures of the Mountain Dog, and it was between the Mountain Dog and the Rottweiler. We just had to have a Mountain Dog, so we contacted Bea Knight in Oregon and the Thompsons in Washington, and they called us back and said they weren't having puppies at that time. Bea Knight never responded to us, and the next thing we knew there was an ad in the paper for one, and that was Carol Pyle from Miragda. I took off, drove down there and brought home this puppy.

What bloodline was she out of?

Carol: Sanctuary Woods Charm. Her sire was Bella's Axel who was out of Thompson Kennels in Washington. There were very few breeders at that time, and you had to hunt and search for one.

Marty: We had more on the West Coast than anywhere at that time. There was one in Texas, but I don't know how many there were on the East Coast then. But we knew there was one in Texas.

Carol: Then we found out that Sylvia House had some.

Did all the Bernese in the '60's go back to the Swiss imports?

Carol: Yes.

Did you do any importing at all?

Marty: No. From what we had seen of the imports and the dogs here, we figured you could produce better dogs by select breeding than you could by buying an import. Even today, imports are definitely not winners, because you have no control. You buy one and that's what you have. If you have your own, you can pick your breeding program and who you will use for a stud and who for a bitch, and hope that you get what you want, but at least you have your start. However, when you buy the import, you don't know the dogs or the backgrounds. The background is what you have to breed to. You are breeding the male's grandparents to the bitch's grandparents. There are only a few, Bear is one, of what I would call really nice imports. You spend all this money for importing them, plus the cost of the animal and you end up with nothing better than what you can breed yourself. There are good kennels there, but you don't go over there as an American tourist to buy yourself a dog. You've got to know where to go, have somebody who speaks the language and understands animals.

Carol: We have a gal who belongs to our local club here who went to Switzerland and brought two puppies back, but she was fortunate, because the lady who went with her to the various kennels spoke the language, and she knew the kennels to go to, so she was very fortunate to get these two males to bring back. She brought them right back on the plane with her.

Marty: It's many miles away, and they say, "When it is old enough, we will ship it to you." We have known people who have not received the same dog they picked out, and you have no recourse. You've paid your money and you take what you get. There are reputable breeders there, but you must have somebody along who knows the language and who knows the breeders.

How many litters have you bred?

Marty: About fifteen litters.

Do you try to keep a puppy out of each litter?

Carol: No. We try NOT to, but it's awfully hard.

Marty: We had Ivan, and I said when he was gone there would be no more males. But we have this one here, Raja. We kept him even though Ivan was still alive. It's very hard to have males when you have bitches. The bitches don't care, but the poor boys, it's hard on them. (laughter)

Carol: We try to trick them by keeping them separate, but they know.

Marty: We feel sorry for them, because it's rough on their systems, just as it would be rough on ours to be panting all the time. (laughter) Sometimes they get to looking pretty bad.

Is there a litter that stands out as your best litter?

Marty: Yes, the B litter. All the dogs in that litter finished except one that had fourteen points. The person we sold it to was a surgeon, and he knew nothing about dogs. He wanted a Bernese Mountain Dog as a prestige thing, and had we known that at the time, we never would have sold him one. He drove a Mercedes, had a beautiful home with a swimming pool, but he didn't have one of these dogs. When his friends came over who had one of these rare dogs, he had to have one of those, too. He allowed one gal to show it and the last time it was shown was at the Cow Palace winter show, and he had taken a four-point major. He came back from the gallery and we were on the bench very excited because he only needed one more point. He had both majors, and the other four of the litter of five were finished. He said, "That's it. We're not going to do any more." The gal who was handling for him pleaded with him and said, "You just pay the entry fee, and I will pick the dog up, groom it and show it." She never charged him anything for showing the dog.

Why did he decide to quit showing?

Carol: He wasn't a doggy person.

Marty: Right. It was a prestige thing and it meant nothing to him. It was just one of those things. He was a little upset with the dog because we had told him that by the time the dogs were two they were generally fully developed, but this dog was a slow comer. He brought him back at three and what a difference. The chest had dropped, and the front end was straight, he had put on weight and he really looked good, but

Ch. Car-Mar's Aquarius V. Copyright CD.

all of the B litter finished, except that one dog.

Which dog is the best dog you've ever owned or bred?

Marty: Aquarius and Buttons. There were others, like Bobby Sox, or any of the B litter. BT was a male, and Aquarius was a male, but he was a little older than BT. At one time, Aquarius was one of the finest cart dogs around. We used to take eight-millimeter film, because there was no such thing as a video recorder in those days, and we were at Clamath Falls, and I was taking pictures outside. Bobby Sox was on one end of this string that went around, and Buttons was on the front with Carol. Anybody with half sense and one eye could see that either one of those dogs were going to win, because they were good show dogs.

Carol: The judge didn't even look at anybody else.

Marty: No, and he had one heck of a time making up his mind. He'd look at one and then walk clear across to look at the other. He went back and forth between them. They were sisters, and he finally gave it to Buttons. She finished on that circuit, we came back to the Mensona show and Carol showed Bobby for the other owner, because the other one was showing Schipperkes. She took a three-point major and finished. I would say of what we owned, out of the A litter the best was A-Miss Aquarius, and out of the B litter would be Buttons and BT (Bout Time).

Carol: It was four hours between BT and another. I said, "It's ABOUT time!" So, that's what we named him.

Marty: Since it was the B litter, we said, "Bout Time." (laughter) He was a very nice male, too. The gal who owned Bobby at that time wanted to show him. One day, we were at the Mensona show and Carol said, "If you want to show him, go ahead." When she came back out of the ring with him, she said, "How do you place his feet? I can't get my hand around his leg to lift it." He was a good sized dog. (laughter)

Carol: He was an escape artist, too. He could get out of anywhere. He could turn handles. He would get out of the kennel yard, come through, open the screen door, go through the garage, and when we'd come home, he would be lying out in the front yard, because we didn't have any fence in the front. He'd be under the tree waiting for us. Our neighbor said, "Oh, he went down the street a little ways, but he came right back."

Did he let any dogs out behind him?

Carol: No. I guess they were too afraid. We had a Doughboy pool, and he loved to go in that, but he wouldn't go in it unless he had his leash on and he could put it in his mouth. Then he'd jump right in and swim around the pool. (laughter) If he didn't have his leash on him, he wouldn't go in, but would sit there and cry.

Marty: Talking about swimming, not all Mountain Dogs swim. They kind of sink down. They try to paddle, you can see them starting to shake, and then it's glub, glub. But he'd swim rough waters. We had him up at Rogue River and he swam in that. He loved the water.

Carol: He'd go down after rocks, and he would bring back the rock you threw into the water. He would go right down to the bottom and get it and bring it back to you.

Marty: Some of them love water and others don't really care about it. With some of them, if you take them to the coast and don't hang onto them, they just keep going out where the breakers are. Others back right off when the water hits them.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

Marty: It's the first three letters of Carol's name, and the first three letters of my name, so it's Car-Mar. Everybody had kennel names in those days, and people asked, what are you going to put on your dogs, "Bred by Carol and Marty?" Who are they? We came up with that name.

Can pedigrees in this breed be trusted as to accuracy?

Marty: From breeders to breeders, I would say yes, but I would be a little skeptical of what I call "outsiders," who have picked up males and females in order to breed.

Carol: Most breeders want to see what each line will produce, and I think they are pretty honest and accurate.

Marty: In the old days, it didn't make much difference, because most of us didn't know whose line was whose anyway, until we got really involved with it after a few years.

Carol: The club puts out a pedigree book, and that's good, because you can see what's in the background and the type of dogs a particular dog is throwing.

What do you think about inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when should each be used?

Marty: We got most of our really good dogs by using linebreeding. You breed to what we call a "stop line," and then you have to go out. You can only breed so close, and then you must go out and start again. What you go out to or with is what you are looking for. If you are trying to breed to big boned dogs, like you are supposed to be, the dogs in the United States compared with Switzerland's are kind of puny. We are trying to at least keep a good sized dog. When you go out, you try to keep something in there that was in the line in the first place, but it's actually an outcross. Then you breed back into your line again.

Carol: Uncle/niece breeding is good.

Marty: We know of people who have bred father to daughter and have come up with some pups that are pretty good. As close as we go is uncle and niece.

Does Switzerland have any restrictions on inbreeding or linebreeding, or is it open?

Marty: Not that we know of, but it's hard to know. What goes on over there is a lot more controlled than what goes on in this country, so I would probably say, though it's not a stated fact, that they do more reputable breeding there than we do in this country. It used to be the state that maintained control of it, but I believe there is a department now, appointed by the state, that takes care of it. It's probably something like our animal control that comes out. It's probably a branch of their government that takes care of something like that.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

Marty: We are always trying to better ourselves. We don't breed until they are two years old, and if we have an exceptionally good bitch at two years who clears, and if your other dogs are three to five years old, if you don't get to breeding pretty quick, you will run out of your bloodline, and if something should happen to your brood bitch, then you don't have any line left. If you come up with something exceptional during linebreeding, you keep that.

So, you are more or less self-taught?

Marty: Yes. When we started, you could call breeders for advice, and we could talk with Bea all day long about what to breed something to, and she would be honest with us. If she didn't think something was a proper breeding, she would say so, but she let you make up your own mind. She wouldn't ever say you couldn't do something, but she had good advice.

Have you established a distinguishable line?

Carol: Yes. We like to keep the coat and bone. We saw in Colorado that some of the dogs had lost bone, and some have the shorter coat, but I prefer the longer coat.

Is the coat supposed to be wavy?

Carol: Yes. We have a puppy out here whose coat is curly. When she gets wet, it curls right up. We are hoping that will go away when she changes her coat. She should be dropping it because she is coming in season. Their puppy coats usually go when they are a year old.

How would you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

Carol: Temperament is number one, and then soundness. If you have a dog that is very sound but throws a bad temperament, that's like having a loaded gun.

What is your long-range goal in breeding dogs?

Marty: We love to show, and as long as we've got something to show and we can continue breeding something respectable that other people would enjoy, too, because we can't keep them all, we are satisfied. The dogs seem to all look alike, but they are different, and each person who is looking for a dog always has his/her own opinion of what they are looking for.

Please describe your interpretation of the perfect Bernese Mountain Dog.

Marty: In the male, it must be sound, because the males are more apt to be unsound than the females because of their rapid growth. The females generally grow slower than the males. Anytime something grows from 1 1/2 pounds to 100 pounds in nine months, there can be a problem. So, the male must be sound with good bone. Either in male or female, they should be symmetrically colored.

How much white are you looking for?

Marty: When I said symmetrical, I meant that all the white has to be where it belongs. In the chest, it doesn't make any difference whether it is a cross with a little fill in or a large patch, but it must be separated at the shoulders. They should have a little white tip on their toes, in front as well as rear, with the russet that comes up and fades into the black on all four legs. Being sound, they would have a proper level topline. If the dog is in proper weight and coat, you should be able to set a glass of water on its back without it spilling as the dog goes around. That means a nice, level topline, and the dog does not rock and roll as he goes around. He should reach and drive enough so that the topline stays perfectly straight around the ring.

Ch. Car-Mar's Bout Time.

The bitches are a little smaller, of course, and they must look feminine. We've had doggy bitches that have done very well under German judges who like them, because they have big, blocky heads and are heavy boned. Generally, what I like to see is the same as in the male, as far as topline and so forth, and symmetrical, but they should look feminine. It's like the difference between a lion and a lioness. You should be able to tell it is a female because it looks more feminine. The males in this breed should look like a male. They are bigger and have more ruff on them when they are in full coat, which makes them stand out so nicely.

Are they supposed to be a square dog, or are they supposed to be a little longer than they are tall?

Marty: They are supposed to be cobby, but especially in males, one that is longer in body will move better than one that is cobby. The reason for that is they have more reach and drive, so their toplines don't wriggle around and they are not trying to compensate at one end or the other. If they are just a shade longer in body, they move better, and they look nicer, and I like them. That's the whole idea of dog shows; it is a dog show, and you are out there to show that dog. If it is a little long in body but sound, you are going to place anyway.

How much reach and drive are they supposed to have?

Marty: If they show on grass and it's damp, if you have one that can really reach and drive, the grass will fly from the rear feet.

Do they single-track when they go fast enough?

Carol: Yes.

Marty: Whatever they are stacked at in the front, what's comfortable for them is where they will reach. They are not supposed to cross over or go to the outside. It should be a beautiful out, reach and down, an arc.

What are their feet like?

Marty: Their feet are compact.

Carol: And are supposed to be tight.

Marty: They should not be splayed when their weight is on the feet. They are tight, round, and not down in pasterns. It's also a semi-webbed foot for snow. It kind of keeps them up in the air. I had this dog in the snow, the first time he had ever been in the snow, and it was deep enough that you really had to work your way up the hillside. He just charged ahead up the hillside and turned around to see where we were.

Is there a 45-degree layback of the front shoulder?

Marty: Yes.

Is there a relationship of the shoulder blade to the length of the upper arm?

Marty: Our judging doesn't get down to the nitty-gritty of that kind of thing. In recent years, though, they have begun checking the front and back teeth to make sure the dogs had them.

Are missing teeth a problem in the breed?

Marty: It's not a problem, really, but it is hereditary. If the dog is missing lower teeth, you can check back through the pedigree and find out if the grandfather and dogs further back had it. If you don't find it on the dog's side, then you check the dam's side and see if the grandparents and great-grandparents had it. Some of the more experienced judges don't bother to check that anymore, but some of the newer judges have read a book on judging and what to look for and they watch for missing teeth. If the dog moves well, is very well balanced and sound, it might not make any difference. It gets down to the nitty-gritty when the judge is left with two good animals, and then they must find something wrong with one in order to put the other one up. Then they start looking for things like missing teeth and dirty ears. You find judges who lay the ears up on both sides. When a dog is groomed for the showring, his ears should definitely be cleaned.

What's the correct bite?

Carol: Either scissors or level.

What are you looking for in a head?

Marty: There is a difference between the male and female head. The male head should be large but not blocky, and not oversized for the size of its body. It has to have a short muzzle, not a long, Collie muzzle. The head should be flat, not domed, and the ears when pulled down should come to the bottom corner of the mouth.

Carol: The shorter the ear, the better, though.

Marty: With the female, you don't want a doggy head. You still need the shorter muzzle, but it should be more feminine. It should not be big and blocky, and it should have a flat top and a nice stop. You don't want the stop to be an inch and a half to two inches high, but it should be well proportioned to the head.

Should the length of the top skull be approximately the same length as the muzzle?

Marty: Yes, that would be the rule of thumb. If you have a huge head, you wouldn't want a little head that made it look like a Pug, and you don't want it to hang out there like a Collie's.

What about eye color?

Marty: The eyes should be dark.

Is the blue eye a disqualification?

Marty: Oh, yes, that's a no-no. We can't have yellow eyes in the Mountain Dogs, either.

What other disqualifications are there?

Marty: The tail should not go around and touch any part of the back.

Carol: It comes from the Tibetan Mastiff.

Marty: A droopy eye is a minor fault. Color combinations are not a disqualification. At the shoulder, it must have a little russet spot. The black and white that comes up from the foot must go into the brown, the russet. You can't have the white coming up from the foot clear to the black. There has to be a divider. These are supposed to be major faults, but they are looking more for soundness, unless it catches the eye to where it looks like the dog is throwing its leg. Otherwise, they don't even bother with it. Color combinations don't seem to make much difference as far as faulting the dogs.

Carol: There is a Mountain Dog that has a russet coat, too.

Is there a russet variety?

Carol: Well, no, it's not supposed to be there, but it pops up every once in a while. (laughter)

Marty: When you get into the ring, you have to have the colors, and the distinguishing breaking points. You can have a thin blaze, and so far they have not thrown anybody out of the ring for having a thin blaze, or whether it has all the white on its face, or that type of thing. Today, there are usually at least one or two in the ring that are very sound, and soundness is what they are looking for – good movement and soundness.

Would you say soundness has improved since the beginning?

Marty: Oh, yes. There weren't too many OFA dogs at that time.

As far as appearance, was there more of a problem with cow hocks back in the old days?

Marty: Yes.

Carol: If you came across a dog that had an OFA, sometimes it was hocky, but what could you do, go for the hocks or go for the hips?

Marty: If you knew the pedigrees, you could go back and check if cow hocking was a problem all the way back a few generations. If it was, you could shy away from it. If it was a problem in just one dog that had OFA hips, then you would go ahead and use it – and hope. Every time you breed, everything is based on hope.

What's the ideal croup drop-off?

Carol: It has a low tailset.

Marty: Theoretically, according to the book, when they move, the tail should be out and flag.

Carol: An upward swirl is permissible, but it is not supposed to touch the back.

Marty: If we go back to the ideal, as they are moving, the tail should be out and flag. That's beautiful.

What's the ideal tail length?

Marty: It should come to the hock or below. It's not supposed to be shorter than to the hock, but it can be longer, because some of them do have longer tails. In fact, sometimes when the puppies start walking around, the tail is dragging the ground.

Should the chest come to the elbow or below?

Marty: Anything but barrel-chested. You don't want it so wide it makes the legs like Bulldog legs. They have to be able to stack perpendicular to the body, and if you had a bulging or barrel-type chest, it would push the shoulders out and the dog would stand semi-Bulldoggy. Sometimes it is hard to tell where the chest comes if the dog has a heavy coat. The object is to get the dog to look as big as possible. The coat around the chest should be brushed down, and all the feathers are brushed back. Some dogs don't have feathering. Some dogs don't have that much to comb back, but you try to make them look as bulky as you can, unless they are overweight in the first place, and then you try to make them look as thin as you can. (laughter)

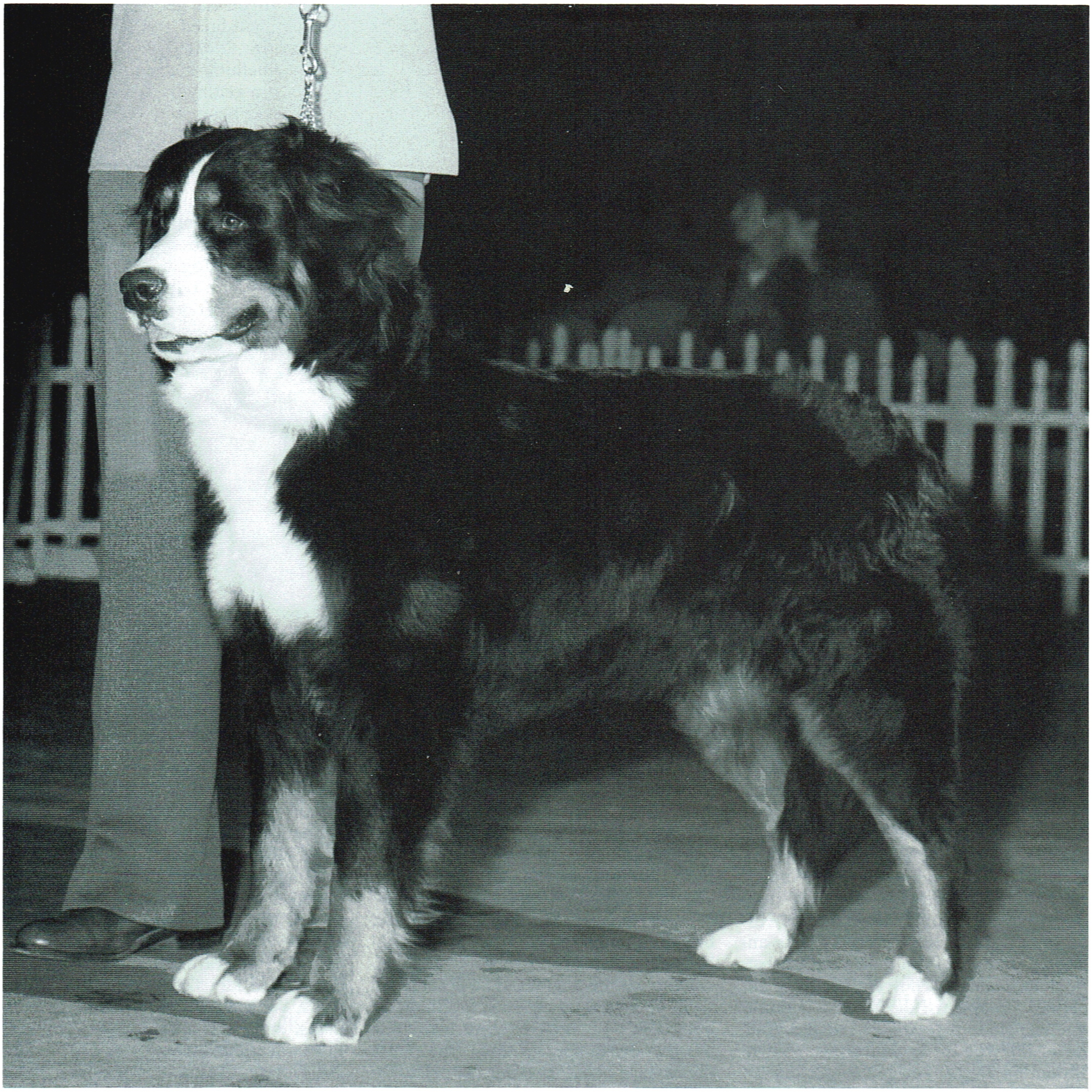
Is coat very important to winning in the ring?

Marty: Yes. It's a dog show. That's what the sign says out front, "Dog Show." The dog must look good to begin with. It's my opinion that most of the judges today look for the beauty of the animal first, and then they keep their eye on that while the dog is moving. Heavy coat is important on the males. It is on the females, too, but you don't usually get the big, heavy coats on the females, though they can still have enough that you can fluff up and make look very nice. The male in good, full coat with his ruff really stands out.

What is the ideal height of a dog and a bitch?

Carol: The males are 27 1/2 maximum, and the female was raised a little bit. It used to be 22 and now it is 23 inches minimum.

Marty: If a dog is well proportioned, sound, looks good and moves well, if it is 28 1/2 inches at the shoulder, there is no reason why you can't win with it. There might be a problem if you have a bitch in there and they want a measurement taken, but so far we haven't gotten quite that critical. If somebody calls for a measurement and a dog is over standard, it can be excused, but nobody in the club has been that mean yet. I don't think I'd ever want to do that. If you can't go into the ring with the expectation of placing without having to complain about something, then you are not much of a sportsman. Nobody ever says much, though there are people who look. They may say, "I wish we'd have a measurement on this one." You want to make sure you know what you are talking about, because it could be coat.



Ch. Car-Mar's Isabella V. Ripper.

What is the ideal temperament for this breed?

Marty: Laid-back.

Even as puppies?

Marty: Yes.

Do they chew things up?

Marty: Raja never has chewed anything up, and his temperament is more typical of the breed. The only thing we have to watch Raja on is meat bones, like knuckle bones. We were watching television the other night and Raja was chewing on an old dried-out piece of bone that had been in the back. All of a sudden we heard a crack, and he broke that sucker right in half, so I took it away from him. When we give the bigger dogs rawhide chews, we only give it to them for a little while or they eat them all up. Once they get the end unrolled, they can swallow the whole thing, and while it may dissolve, they might choke on it.

What are the most serious faults in the breed today, or the most common ones?

Marty: Size. If you take the whole run of nationwide dogs and put them into a field, I would say size, if you are going with the Swiss standard.

Carol: They are supposed to be a draft animal, and when you take a little dog that is 22 or 23 inches, it can't pull a cart.

Marty: When they are small, you have to use two animals. The females should look feminine, but they should still have some size. Of course, there are a lot of males in the ring that are at the supposedly filled out age of two years, but they don't look like they could go out and do a day's work. When I trained Aquarius for the cart, we worked the back field with a tire and a wheel, which I shouldn't have done, but I don't think I hurt him any. He could pull.

The breeders are doing very well with dysplasia, in both shoulders and rears. They seem to be very conscientious of this now, so soundness is better, but they are not breeding for size. Maybe they are a little afraid to, I don't know. There are larger males that breeders show, but they don't clone themselves. They use them for stud dogs, but they don't throw themselves as far as size. Raja's father was an import, and all of the males out of that litter look alike. They are basically all clones. They have the beauty. I don't know about him yet on his size, because he is not yet three years old. With Mountain Dogs, you never get disappointed regarding size until they are three years old. If you bought a male as a show male and he is still only 24 inches tall, then you've got a problem. Usually, by the time they are three years old, the chest has dropped and the dog is perfect. These are the things you learn as you go along, because there are no set rules for any of this.

Everything you do is a gamble all the way down the line. You can't tell anybody on the phone that you are going to have puppies in three months. The first thing you have to do is find the right dog to breed to. After you've done that, the next thing is to try to get them bred. Some of these bitches will stay in season five to seven days, and some of them will go up to fourteen, fifteen and sixteen days before they are ready to breed. You are just wasting your time taking it to the vet to have a slide made. The best thing is to have a male at your house and they will tell you when it's time. Some of them come in early, and sometimes they come in late – or anytime in between.

Carol: When we took Opal down the first time to breed to Bear, we tried and tried. Bear is a little short and he wouldn't let us help him, so we took her over and had an AI. I had the progesterone tests done on her, and my vet said, "Take her tomorrow," and it was the ninth day. When I got her down there, the owner was out of town so Louise Orr helped me. We went to the vet and he took a slide, he said, "She's not ready yet." I said, "According to her progesterone she is," so he did it and she had eight puppies.

So, the slide didn't tell you anything.

Marty: Nope. The old males we used to have long ago when we used all our own stock would tell us when it was time. We'd sometimes wonder what was going on because he'd be lying there asleep and she'd be running around acting like a fool. But when it was time, look out! That was it and it was all taken care of.

Should champions be specialed?

Marty: I believe in specialing. If you have, for instance, a nice male that consistently wins and gets his points and is done in seven or eight shows, that one should be specialed. If the dog is a fast winner, is that good, I do. If you have a breeding program, and you know the background on this dog is good, and you want to get the dog out there because of what you want to produce with somebody else who has a bitch or male, the more you can special them, the more people hear about it. Some people don't pay any attention to class winners. If you get through quickly and don't do any more with the dog, that's old news to people, but if that dog is kept out in the front, then ...

Carol: That's what I said about Ch. Car-Mar's Quincy Boy. Keep him out there. Nobody is going to know he's out there unless you keep him out in the ring. There's this one line that's here, and people don't know there are other dogs because we haven't bred that much.

Marty: If you are really in the dog breeding business, then you would keep your dog out there in order to better the breed. If you can get breeding contracts for him, and breed and sell the puppies out of him ... But I don't want that. I want something that when I breed it, I know I am getting the best I can, so that when I sell a puppy to somebody, I can say, "Here's the father, here's the mother. Let's hope they turn out like this." It's the best you can do that is important. Nobody can guarantee a puppy will be a show quality dog, so you try to get as close as possible so you can say, "Due to this dog and that dog, this puppy may turn out to be a good show dog." Some people you listen to have all show dogs and no pets.

Does it mean anything to make the Top Ten or Twenty?

Marty: Sure, but now we are getting into what is political, like going to Madison Square Garden once a year. Mountain Dogs don't win too often, because as far as people are concerned there, it's still a dog that is way down on the list. When we used to go into Groups, we knew we weren't going to do anything, but it was just the idea of getting out there and letting people see the breed. It CAN get the Group. One of the first that ever made Group placings in this area was Black Lance. They have better dogs today than what he was, but to even get to go to Group isn't so much now as it was then. Today, to go into the Group, somebody will do it, because there are so many more Mountain Dogs, but it is still very hard to place. There are Mountain Dog Group winners out there.

Carol: Yes, Jackson and Bear were fighting. One would take one show and the other would take another show.

Would popularization help or harm this breed?

Marty: Harm it, and it's already done it. As far as other known breeds of dogs, such as Shepherds and Dobermans, we're still a long ways from having an overpopulation.

Carol: Yes, but when you have people calling you on the phone asking, "How much money can you make?"

Ch. Car-Mar's Early Mist.

that's too popular.

Marty: That's not to say everybody is that way, but after talking to so many of these people, you can read between the lines. They already have a bitch and they want to buy a male. Well, anybody with sense knows they want to breed the dogs. Because they paid $800 or $900 for their bitch, they want to get their money back, but they don't really get their money back. You'd be surprised at the breeders who sell them with no shots, so their investment in the puppies is minimal. People have to take them to their own vets and get the shots, so food would be the only expense the breeder would have. If you have a bunch of bitches that you keep breeding, to where you are having a litter every month, or maybe two litters a month …

Carol: Not me! No way! One litter wears me out. (laughter)

Marty: Yes, but you have to look at it from the aspect of what some breeders are doing. Are they breeding for the betterment of the breed, or are they breeding for dollars and cents? That's what happens when a breed becomes popular, it becomes dollars and cents. Then, when we get so many of them that the sales begin to drop off, you might as well get out of it, because nobody will buy them.

Is judging fair?

Marty: No.

What can be done to improve it?

Marty: Nothing. I don't really know. Theoretically, it helps to have a handler on a dog. The last show we went to at Livermore was the first time in all the years I've owned Mountain Dogs, that other than having too many winning, we had to have a handler. I had to have somebody handle my dog because I had a bad ankle.

So, you've always handled all your own dogs?

Marty: Yes.

Carol: That's the fun of it. You produced this dog and you want to be the one out there getting all the credit, and if you don't win, you don't win. Okay.

Do the judges know your breed well or not?

Carol: I think it's getting better.

Marty: I was told that it used to be the judges were judged on what they could judge. There weren't that many all breed judges as there are today. I have more respect for a judge who has to look at the standard.

Carol: If he is questioning something that he is looking at and it's not right, then he is learning. If they are licensed for a breed, they should know what the standard is.

Marty: How do you get a license for a breed if you don't know what you are judging?

If they would have to have a license for Sporting breeds, Toy Breeds, Terriers, that would be better. The way people feel about judges is if they win, he's the best judge in the world, and if they lose, they will never show under that judge again. That's one way to look at it. You are actually only paying for one man's or lady's opinion of what he or she thinks of your animal. I don't really believe judges are doing that bad a job, except there are a lot of politics involved. Especially in our breed, we didn't used to have a lot of handlers, and the judges could judge the dogs. Now, in order to keep everybody happy, if you have three or four handlers in there, especially in the Breed ring, it's very hard to come up through the ranks and do anything, unless you have a professional handler. The judges are doing as good as they can. Those who are doing it right are the judges who put one dog up in one class and another up in another class and give Reserve to another dog. That keeps everybody happy, because everybody wins a little something, instead of having Winners Dog and Best of Breed all in one dog.

Carol: I'd like to see judges put up a female for Breed – take the chance and let a female have it once in a while. There are some nice females out there.

Marty: They are afraid to. We've seen some beautiful working females and yet they do nothing.

Carol: There was one show where there were some specials, and there was a bitch that came in from Colorado and took all three Breeds, but she was a nice girl.

Does advertising influence judges?

Carol: Oh, yes. (laughter)

Marty: We haven't shown for eight years, but when we were showing all the time, the judges always got a picture. I don't think it did a lot of good then. It's like having trophies. You are so excited about the first one that you build a trophy shelf, and pretty soon you have so many trophies you don't know where to put them all. It's probably the same way with judges who have umpteen million pictures, so they just start putting them into boxes.

Carol: Cheever Smith judged at the fairgrounds here a long time ago. We had Buttons then. It was almost time for lunch, so he gave her the points. He said, "You just stick around this ring. I'm going to get my wife to come and see this dog." We had to wait until his wife got through with her assignment to come over and see our dog. He was a judge we liked. (laughter)

Have you ever handled for other people as a favor?

Marty: Yes. I handled Katherine Brock's Bear, Ch. Car-Mar's I'ma Bear – the old, original Bear, not the one she has now.

Carol: He was out of our I litter.

Marty: He was Ivan's brother. Bear was huge. He reminded you of a Newfoundland. He had heavy coat, and how they could keep coat living where they did, I don't know. The Bear she has today has that long, flowing coat. We figure it is from being an import, because most imports have the long, flowing coat. But this one of our own breeding, a brother to Ivan, had a big coat like a Newfoundland. I handled for her at that time, because she and her husband, who was a doctor, didn't know who to go to as a professional handler. The doctor asked me about it and said, "I would like you to handle him, because he likes you, rather than go to a stranger." I got his two majors on him in two shows, and told them, "Now, all you have to do is to get somebody to handle him for his individual points."

Carol: They didn't get a professional handler. It was somebody who had Great Danes who liked to show dogs.

Marty: He finished Bear. For as big as Bear was, he was very easy to handle. He was good sized and had a beautiful coat, but he was all business. He wasn't a dog that liked to play, but it just depended on who was on the end of the lead whether he paid any attention to you or not. He was happy-go-lucky.

Carol: They lived in Los Gatos, and the doctor worked at the hospital there. Bear went to work with the doctor and would sit outside the door where the doctor went in and wait for him to come out. They came to visit us one time and we went to a restaurant, and Bear sat outside the window while they ate dinner and just stayed right there. If they went uptown to Los Gatos and went into a shop, he would wait for them. Nobody touched him. He just sat there. He had that air about him.

How do you start training your dogs for carting?

Marty: There are dogs that pull carts, and then there are cart dogs. If you want a cart dog, you want to start when they are just weeks old, instead of waiting for them to be months old. If you want a good cart dog, it will cost you some money at the beginning, but after they get so big, you can get the expandable type harnesses, so they can be adjusted. They should be started young with a harness. You put it on for just a few minutes each day, and while it's on, it's work time, but it's still play for the puppy to keep the puppy's mind off its confinement. As times goes on, they know what the harness is, so when you pick it up and want to use it, they don't take off and run the other way and hide because they don't want to do it.

By the time they get old enough to do anything, which is at least after they have had their primary hip X-rays at a year, they are still not pulling anything, but you put the harness on and go for a small walk with them. By this time, they can't wait to get the harness on. Afterwards, you say, "Good boy," or "Good girl," and I'm a sap and give them a cookie. They know that whatever they are doing, they are doing right. As it goes along, you can use three-quarter-inch dowels that you fasten onto the harness, and you have a piece of something hanging onto the back of it to hold it together, and you let them drag it around. You use something that doesn't make noise but is easy to pull. This also gives them training so when you put them between the shafts, they don't feel they are confined. They are plain dowels that go out behind them, to which you bolt a board so it doesn't all fall apart. You fasten that to the harness and let them drag it around. You should do it on grass, like at a park, because if you do it on the road, it will wear out on the bottom, and it makes a lot of noise, which the dog isn't ready for.

You do that until they feel comfortable pulling it around, and you always talk to them, which keeps their mind off what is going on behind them. After that, you get somebody to go along with you to hold it up so that it is actually going alongside and they can actually feel their hips hitting it over their rear hips. The whole idea is to train them not to panic when they are into a real set of shafts. At eighteen months, I have an exercise cart, which weighs practically nothing, and I see what they will do with that. They are not panicky, because they already know what these shafts are. Now, you must keep them calm when it goes on gravel or bounces, because it is on rubber wheels. Nine times out of ten, it won't bother them a bit. You are still walking with the dog, and there is no weight on the cart whatsoever. The cart probably only weighs 25 pounds.

It isn't what they pull that can hurt them. It's what's on their back that causes them to readjust their shoulders to their hips. Their bones are not solid enough at that age to actually pull any weight, so you just keep practicing with the cart, or whatever, until after they have their final at two years. If their hips are okay, then you put them on the full sized cart, which weighs about 35 pounds, and the weight on their shoulders is probably one to two pounds. You still walk with them, even though you could get in and ride. You let them get used to pulling something a little heavier, and pulling doesn't bother these guys one iota. They will pull, but it's the idea of them having too much weight on the back. The carts that I build, when you sit in them, they amount to very little weight. When the cart is attached, there is probably only one or two pounds across their shoulders, which isn't much, and when you sit in it, it comes up to zero. You keep doing that until you can get somebody else to lead the dog and you can get into the cart.

Carol: That's where I come in.

Marty: Then you get into the cart and go with the dog. Generally, that's as far as most people want to go with it. As I said, there is a difference between a dog pulling a cart and a cart dog.

Carol: They can make a lot of figure eights and hee haws this way and that way. Marty has a collar with little rings on each side, and when he pulls one side, the dog turns that way.

Marty: I started training Aquarius in 1971, and in 1973, I was at the Rose Parade with him and he was rein broke. You have the reins coming back and you only have to put them on your little fingers, and move them slightly, and the dog can feel that little movement and go in that direction until you bring him back, so you can go clear around and back the other way. You have to have a great deal of patience. Just because the dog pulls the cart doesn't mean you are going to throw a set of reins on the dog, get into the cart and go to town. Sometimes, you might go to town all right when the dog takes off and you have no way of stopping him.

Carol: Ivan didn't like the cart. If you hooked him up, he stood there with his head down saying, "I hate this, I hate this, I hate this!" (laughter)

Marty: Ivan didn't care for it and Mister didn't care for it. She was what you called a doggy bitch. Her name was actually Early Mist, or Missy, but I called her Mister because she looked more like a dog than a bitch.

Carol: If Marty put the harness on her in the front room, she would stay there and not move.

Marty: She'd stay there by the hour and not move.

So, you have some that are inclined to it and some that aren't?

Marty: Yes. A lot of people will take a dog to a carting class when they are two or three years old, put the cart on the dog, and they will do it because they are told to, but they are not happy about it because they are being forced to do it. They get them out onto a grassy area where there are absolutely no distractions and they do fine and pull the cart, but the dogs need to be trained against distractions. When they are in the traces, they are confined and they know it, and you must make sure they understand that everything is still okay.

We used to take our dog down to the end of the road before there was so much traffic, and there was a little dog that thought it would tear our dog up because it knew it was confined in the traces and couldn't get back at him. Our dog didn't get upset. We turned around and came back and I got my two big bitches and put them on eight-foot leads and we went down the road. That dog came flying out and saw these dogs, turned around, sat in his driveway and never bothered me again when I'd come by with my cart dog.

It's strictly a person's prerogative if he or she wants to rein break so they can get into the cart and ride. You have to have a lot of patience, and it is generally done with a leader, somebody with the dog, and you controlling the reins until the dog is trained. If you get into the cart without a lead person, and the dog sees a cat or something that startles it and takes off, you are in deep trouble, because you don't know where you will end up. Aquarius worked very well in the cart and he loved it. I had bells on his heavy harness. If I wanted to go to the store or something, wherever he was, he would come running, stand there waiting for the harness to be put on him, and he thought that was the biggest thing. He is the only dog I've had that was really enthusiastic about it, and I bet it didn't take me fifteen minutes to rein break him.

You don't have snow here, so you couldn't use a sled.

Marty: No, not here, but I am trying to figure out how to build my carts so that you can use the wheels in the summertime and take them off and install skis in the wintertime when there is snow. I haven't gotten to the point where if you go over a rise, the skis won't dig in in the front. They have to be set back a little bit and you have to use a shock-like thing on it, like they do on airplanes, so the skis are always just a shade up, and when you go over a rise, they won't dig in. Then the dog might try to pull harder and rip the skis right off the cart.

Our dog would pull two full-sized adults. When we were getting ready for the Rose Parade, the dog club here in Santa Rosa asked me to lead their part of the parade. We were out at the fairgrounds in a big building and they said we could practice there. The man who was in charge of all the different things was out there, and he would walk long distances from one thing to another trying to keep everything going. I said to him, "Why don't you get into the cart? Why walk when you can ride around?" We did that all evening, went from place to place, and that was good practice. (laughter)

Do you do any early conformation training or obedience training?

Marty: If you are going to keep a puppy out of a litter, you start very early with conformation on your own.

Carol: But we don't do it so much that it burns the puppy out. They can get bored. Puppies are like little kids, and their attention span is not long. If you keep it a game and just take them every once in a while and keep them well socialized, that's the main thing.

Marty: Sanctuary Woods Black Lance was at every show, and he got to the point that he didn't even know who you were. I saw him out here at a show and went up to him; he didn't know who I was.

Carol: Before that, whenever he saw us, he would come up wagging his tail and be so glad to see us, but when we saw him out here, he didn't even know us. We told Bea, and she would not leave her dog out where he was not happy. She pulled him and had him brought right back home. It's a dog show, and the best way your dog is going to show is to be happy.

Marty: Some of them get to be like zombies. They wouldn't need a handler, but could do it by themselves because they know the whole routine.

Do you go to any fun matches or training classes?

Marty: Yes. We have drop-in training classes, and even when the dogs are ready to be trained for showing, we don't join for six or eight weeks, but we drop in. There are drop-in classes for $2 a dog.

Carol: And we go to fun matches, too, because that gives the dogs an idea of what a regular show is like.

Marty: It makes a difference, rather than just throwing them into a showring. With fun matches, they get some idea of what it is all about.

Do you still do obedience training with your dogs?

Marty: No, not anymore, though we used to.

Carol: I had a dog that I placed with an older couple who had had one of our dogs before, and he passed away, so the woman wanted Quantum Leap. She was a very active puppy and would boing off of everything. She was the happiest puppy. The woman had wanted her ever since she popped out of the womb. She had to have that dog. I said, "I want to see how she turns out." She turned out to be small and didn't have the bone. She was a very sound puppy, but not what I would want out in the ring. She would make a good obedience dog, and that's what she said she would do with her. Every time I talked with this woman on the phone, she would ask, "When can I have her? When are you going to make up your mind?" Finally, I said, "Okay," and I had her spayed and put her out with the lady. She had a handler come to her house to train her, but the woman's back went out and she is waiting to have an operation on her back so she can get back out with the dog to do the obedience.

We went out to see her. It was the second time I've ever placed an older dog, and it was like tearing my arm off, because she was the sweetest thing. She was the type of dog that would come up and try to put her arms around you. We went out to see her, and she was so excited that we were there. We watched the dog show and then we left. I called the woman afterwards and told her it was nice to have gone out and shown her the pictures. She said, "Do you know what Sassy did when you left? She went to the front and bawled." I said, "Okay, I'm not coming around anymore. It's too hard on me and it's too hard on the dog."

How old was she when you placed her?

Carol: A little over a year. When the dogs are here, they are part of our family.

Marty: Here, they are all in the house. When the weather is warm, we leave the door open and they come and go as they want. Some like to lie on the couch, so we let them do that.

Carol: This is their home. We bought the motor home and put all the crates in it so they could go with us wherever we went.

Marty: We take all five of them, whether they are entered or not.

Carol: That way, I don't have to worry about them. My sons are right around the corner, but these guys are so used to having somebody around all the time.

Have you done any tracking?

Marty: No, I'm not interested in that, and also I'm not interested in carting in the specialty shows.

Is it a competition?

Marty: You can get a draft title, but the dogs are not competing one against the other.

What does it take to get a draft title?

Carol: They have to go through obstacles and open gates.

Marty: And back up, which is the hardest thing to do, though you only have to back up a foot. You have a Novice and an Open class, and Novice is all done on leash, just like in obedience, and when you go into Open class, everything is done free-hand, and there is no leash on the dog. It has to mind you as you go. You walk next to them. It's just like an obedience thing, only they are dragging a cart. They have long sits and downs.

Can you talk to them?

Marty: You can't tell them to back up.

So, just like with heeling, when you reverse, they reverse?

Marty: When you get into the Open class, there is no speech. In the Novice class there is speech, especially when it is heel or whatever you want to use. I'm a cart dog enthusiast, and when a dog is in the traces, it does not sit or lie down, because it looks so ugly to have a dog sit in its traces or lie down, but in the carting class, that's what you have to do. They took it from the Newfoundland class and then added and subtracted some things. When they sent the draft to me for my opinion, I told them I didn't care for the long sits and downs. If you are going to have something like that, have a three-minute stand/stay. In fact, with the cart I have now, there is no way he could lie down, because he has a back strap. He could not possibly lie down, because it is fixed so he has equal weight from one end to the other.

So, each class gives a different degree of title, like the Novice gives DD for draft dog and Open gives DDX for draft dog excellent?

Marty: Something like that. We watched the Open one in Colorado, and it was wonderful to see how these dogs mind, and still get through all the trials. There is one place where the dogs have to come through a place that is only six inches wider than the cart the dog is pulling, which means you have three inches on each side. You only get one shot at this, and sometimes people cut the corner a little short and then their cart is crooked without striking. The lady in Open class knew what she was doing with her dog, and she lined things up straight. You have to learn all this stuff. At the end, you have the half-mile or whatever it is, where you have to pull with your cart.

Carol: We have the video of it, where they all went on a long hike with their dogs and carts, one right behind the other.

Marty: They have a basic weight, only it is just a blanket that is rolled up, but it's the idea of being able to go through that process.

Carol: They put weights in the carts, because all of them weighed differently.

Marty: That was for the long haul. They had to put weights on the carts for the half-mile hike.

What advice would you give to owners who would like to handle their own dogs?

Marty: Do it. Take a class. The dog will learn if the person knows what he or she is doing; otherwise, the dog will be confused because you are not doing it correctly. Take handling classes for people, and then go in with your dog.

Carol: It's so self-satisfying to do it yourself.

Marty: Win or lose, it doesn't make any difference, but it is the idea that when you place, you feel so much better that you are doing it, rather than

Car-Mar's Friendly Persuasion.

paying someone else.

Carol: Then you know in your mind that you won because of the dog and not because of a handler.

You mentioned problems knowing exactly when a bitch was ovulating, so when you do a breeding, do you normally use AI?

Marty: No.

Carol: With Opal and the dog we used for our last litter, the woman is a good friend, so she just left him here with me. They fiddled and fiddled, and Opal had never bred, because the first litter was AI, so every time he'd mount her, away she'd go.

Marty: You get to the point where you say, "You guys are going to get bred one way or the other." We gave them a hand the first time, and after that they did it on their own. AI's are not the same as doing it naturally. In the first place, there is a time element between drawing the sperm and getting it into the female. When you get a tie, you have more of a mental assurance that the dogs have been bred.

Carol: Opal was so mad. As soon as they were untied, she yowled and talked to him. She was terrible. Then, the next day, we bred them again and it was quick. We held onto her and he tied right away, but afterwards, she had to tell him again that he was a bad dog. (laughter) That night, they did it on their own, and she didn't cuss him out. He had her permission then.

What is a fair stud fee in the Bernese Mountain Dog?

Ch. Car-Mar's Aquarius V. Copyright CD.

Marty: Generally, it's a trade-off for a pick puppy, or it is the price whoever sells the puppies usually charges.

Carol: Some people have a basic figure and then for every puppy over that they charge extra.

Marty: Some breeders say one or more, but how can you have a litter if it is only one puppy? A "litter" is at least two or more. If you have two puppies, you pay the basic fee. If the puppies die, that's too bad, because they were born alive, so the male did his job and you would have to pay the stud fee. Sometimes people will set a litter size at five or six puppies, and then maybe charge $50 for each puppy over that. Each breeder who has come along in the last ten years has his or her own stipulations, rules and regulations, so it is hard to generalize about what the breeders do in this breed. There are some who get between $1,000 and $1,200 for a puppy, and others get between $600 and $900, which is where it should be. Even $900 is still a lot of money to pay for a dog.

Is your male at stud to outside bitches?

Marty: No, he's too young. In fact, he hasn't even been shown. I didn't actually keep him to show, I kept him as a cart dog, and I kind of got the cart before the horse there. (laughter) I got the cart and then I decided I wanted him for a cart dog. If I decide to show him, he would have to be trained for the ring, and then I don't know whether I would breed him or not. He is OFA, and I generally don't use our stud dogs on anything but our own. We try to keep them for ourselves. I put Aquarius out for stud for a friend of ours.

Carol: That was uncle/niece and that produced sixteen puppies.

Marty: And fifteen of them lived. The bitch was one of ours from before. That's the only time Aquarius ever bred anything. Nobody seems to know who holds the record, but sixteen is quite a few puppies as far as Mountain Dogs are concerned.

Carol: The bitch was showing at three weeks.

Marty: They asked us to come down, and they were taking a lottery on how many puppies she was going to have, and she couldn't have gotten though the gate. She was huge! I said she would have twelve puppies, and I was way off. Our friend was up for three days with those puppies without any sleep at all, feeding them by hand and switching them around to nurse, and she only lost one.

What kind of faults would keep you from breeding a dog or a bitch?

Marty: Basically, soundness and temperament.

Carol: If you have a dog that is sound but aggressive and throws it in the puppies, why breed him and keep that going? You want to take that out of your line.

Marty: If you are going to have a good working Mountain Dog, the temperament is the first thing you look at, and if they are aggressive, you might as well put them away because they will never be any good except for guard work or something along those lines. You can't have a dog like that and show it. All they would have to do is bite somebody, or somebody's dog and rip half its face off, and you are in deep trouble. So, you don't want any temperament problems, and you want a sound dog. Color combinations you can work out later on down the road, and they don't make that much difference, unless they all turn black or something like that.

Is it a good idea to breed to a top-winning dog regardless of pedigree?

Marty: No. I want to breed for not only our general rules, like soundness, but I want a dog that can clone itself. If you have a beautiful male that can't produce himself, why bother? You can breed to any OFA'd dog and possibly produce soundness, but if you have a beautiful bitch and you want the beauty of a certain dog, but it can't produce itself, there is no point in breeding them. It is important to know what a dog has produced prior to using him. All the males Bear produced are his clones, just like him, though they have better heads than he did. Bear has the old country head. All of his offspring all look alike. They all have the same beautiful markings and all look like one another, so he can produce himself. As far as breeding is concerned, you do the best you can with what you can see, but unless the genes at the time of conception are exactly as they were the time before when you got the clones, you won't get the same thing over again.

Carol: We are going to go back to Bear again, and we are hoping it will be the same.

Marty: That doesn't mean we will get it. There is no one in the world who can tell you when the genes are right in the male and the female. Maybe we'll get what we want and maybe we won't. We may get all pets, who knows? You can't start with dysplastic, raggy looking dogs and expect to come up with something good. You have to use the very best specimens you can find that have the backgrounds of what you want to have a hope as to what the bitch will produce. If it works, it works, and if it doesn't, you've done the best you can. Years ago, you never knew what you would get. By the time a dog was three years old, it might be so tied up with dysplasia it couldn't move at all, or it might be cow hocked, but you fell in love with it when it was a puppy and bought it. No matter what breed it is, or even if it is a common cur from the dog pound, when you take that dog home, it becomes a loved member of your household, and no matter what it turns out to be, you are stuck with it. That's the way it was. It was yours when you bought it. When it was a puppy, unless it was something you could definitely see, you did not know what it would turn out to be, and by the time it was six months old, you loved it so much, what could you do with it?

Is there more consistency in the breed now?

Marty: Yes.

Carol: And there is more consistency in lines, too. You can pick out a dog and say, "That's So-and-So's dog."

Marty: Before the Cow Palace in February, we had people calling us about puppies, and I told them, "If you are local, go to the Cow Palace. There will be many dogs there and more breeders, and each breeder is breeding for what he or she thinks is the ultimate dog. Maybe your idea is like one breeder's, and you don't care anything about the dogs of another breeder, so you talk to the first breeder. That way, you can get your name on their list and you will possibly be able to get a puppy from them." That's what we were telling people before February when they called for puppies, because everybody's opinion of the breed is their own of what they have in their heads. If you have a variety, you will find people that will satisfy you with what they get.

How many litters should a bitch have in her lifetime?

Marty: In this breed, you should not breed a bitch after she is six years old.

Carol: It depends on the bitch and how easily she whelps, but if we don't start until they are two years old, and stop at six or so, then it is about four litters.

Marty: I know people who breed every six months. Every time their bitches come in season, they breed them. If you are interested in dollars and cents, that's fine, but it is very hard on bitches to be bred every six months. Once a year is enough.

Carol: It's also too much work for the breeder. With Opal's last litter, she had twelve and lost two, so she had a lot to do.

What is the average litter size?

Marty: Seven or eight.

Carol: I'd much rather just have six.

Marty: Five is really nice, and you get nice puppies that grow very rapidly. They stay nice, firm and fully packed. (laughter) You have to give this litter credit, though, because these guys were up and walking at about three days of age. They weren't crawling, they were up on their feet walking. We have a pen we put up for the bitch and puppies to be outside, and we had to put them out in it, because they kept crawling out of the box. They got out earlier than usual and we couldn't have that. In the middle of the night, we would find them underneath the bed and everywhere.

Carol: They are in the bedroom with us, and when they are three weeks old, we put them into another room, but we had to put this litter outside. I use a pad, like what they have on hospital beds, and it's wonderful, because the puppies will go off that and right back to mom. It's better than newspaper, because it goes through that stuff and stays dry on top.

Do you help your bitches whelp?

Marty: We are always there, whether they can do it themselves or need help.

Carol: We open the sacks. We figure the quicker you can get them out of there, the faster they will start off. I cut the cord.

Marty: We have all of our equipment there – forceps, scissors, ties.

Carol: With her first litter, she insisted on having it in a wire crate, where she could hardly turn around. She came out, plopped the puppy in my lap and went back in. I got it all cleaned up, and she looked at me as if to say, "Well, Mom, it's yours. That's what you wanted, now you take care of it." (laughter)

When you cut the cord, do you tear or cut it?

Carol: I cut it raggedy with the scissors.

Marty: If they are too short, they will bleed, so you put the forceps on and tie them.

Are they easy whelpers?

Carol: With our last litter, she started at noon and had her last puppy at 7:00 in the evening, and she had twelve puppies. If she didn't go right into labor, I would take her out and walk her around a little bit and come back in and she would have a puppy. I have some homeopathic stuff that throws them right into labor. It's something from Pridikin's book. If the bitch is not having contractions, you give them one of these pills every fifteen minutes, and it will start them right off. It's a tissue salt.

Marty: It's better than drugs.

Carol: One bitch we had needed a

C-section. The vet said she could not have her next litter normally, or you couldn't give her any pit, so we gave her this pill and milk and honey, all of which helps the uterus. During the last three weeks of their pregnancy, they get raspberry leaves.

A friend, Debbie, had a bitch that went through pyometra and they caught her and got her through it, and she started giving her raspberry leaves and she is pregnant now. With a sonogram, they could see one puppy, but the bitch was getting so upset by it that Debbie said, "Quit. At least I know there is one in there." The raspberry leaves will bring the uterus back into tone again.

Marty: If you are not going to breed your bitch, you'd better get them spayed in this breed. If you don't, by the time they are three, they will have pyometra. With these dogs, it's just as common as getting a cold.

Is that a uterine infection?

Carol: Yes.

Is there any particular thing that would predispose them to that?

Marty: No. It just seems to be in the breed, and they are susceptible to it for whatever reason. They seem to be susceptible to many things, and a lot of people wouldn't even put up with our breed. They get a lot of cancer, and at one time, even dogs fifteen months old were passing on with it.

What kind of cancer?

Marty: All kinds. The ones that were younger, were dying of lymphosarcoma. Aquarius died at five years old of bone cancer. Until the cancer is advanced, there are no symptoms, and then when you take them to a vet to find out what's wrong with them, it's too late. These guys, no matter how much excruciating pain they are in, they never cry. They took a marrow sample out of his leg, he never cried, and he played with Charm outside here, one of his puppies. You know he was in pain, but he never cried. The only time I ever heard a cry was before Ivan died, and he was in pain and really hurting.

Are they ultrasensitive to pollutants?

Carol: They could be sensitive to pollutants because they come from such a clean country.

Marty: Even though they've been raised here, these animals do better in higher altitudes and colder weather. If you get them down in the Louisiana valleys and places like that, they don't last long, or anywhere it is hot and humid. Here, it's bad enough, but they can put up with the heat as long as they stay out of the sun and have plenty of water to drink.

Carol: If you look at the foods we feed them, everything is contaminated.

Marty: If we have it in our own food, what's in the dog food?

Carol: Our girls like to chew things so much that I told Marty this morning I would go over to the market here where they have meat that is supposed to be hormone-free and organic, and see if they had some soup bones we could give them. At least with those bones, you would know the marrow of the bones wasn't all full of chemicals.

Do you ever supplement feed puppies, and if so, what do you use?

Carol: We lost a mother the night her puppies were born, so I had to feed the puppies. I used Esbilac, but it didn't do as good as the goat's milk. With the last litter Opal had, we used New Born, that stuff you mix with warm water, and it is good stuff! It's supposed to be almost the same as the female's milk.

Did you tube-feed the puppies?

Carol: No, we bottle-fed them all. I'd be feeding one and another puppy would be crawling up my pant leg, and I'd holler out, "Come and get this puppy out of my pant leg!" because there was nothing I could do while I was feeding the other one. (laughter)

Marty: After the dogs are grown, you sit back and laugh about it.

Carol: Each one would nurse and get so mad because it was all done so quickly. One used to take the nipple and pull on it, like, "Give me more!"

Do you wean the puppies or let the bitch do it?

Carol: I let the mother do it, unless it was like Felicia, who at eleven weeks was still nursing them!

What age are they usually weaned?

Carol: When the puppies' teeth start coming in really good, at about four or five weeks.

Marty: But they are on solid food before that.

What do you start them with?

Carol: The last time it was New Born and the baby cereal, and we gradually make a mush out of the regular puppy food. Talk about sticky in their long hair!

Marty: They lick each other off, but they don't get it all out. It gets like crust.

At what age do you evaluate your puppies?

Marty: We do it as it goes along – five weeks, six weeks, and at seven and eight weeks we watch them very closely. We want to be sure we do the best we can to give show quality to the people who have asked for show quality. We have a long sidewalk between the kennels, and we get down there and one of us calls the puppy and watches it, and then we turn it around so we can watch its rear end as it goes back again. We do that until they are eight weeks. If another breeder, or somebody who knows the breed, is going to buy a certain puppy, they will do the same thing to be sure. That's good, because then they don't take just your word for it. If they see it is doing what it is supposed to do, they are happier and we are happier.

Carol: We sent one to Colorado, and that's the first one we've sent like that. She has thirteen points and she's OFA'd, elbows and hips, and she will be going to the specialty if she holds her coat. Her owner says she is so different looking from the dogs that are there with this Bear coat on her.

Marty: It's like the one we have outside. He has Bear's coat, and he's just started to drop it during the past few warm days we've had, so he's blown all his undercoat and he doesn't look as fluffy as he used to.

Then between five and eight weeks is a kind of window age for you to evaluate them?

Marty: Yes. You won't see anything in movement before that. About all you can see then is if they have nice bone and if their color combination is good. People who are buying their first show dog have read the books, and they don't want color off to the side, they want it perfect, because this is what they read in the book. We have a 72-hour time for the buyer to take the puppy to their own vet. If their vet advises them not to buy the puppy, the money is promptly refunded. But that's not the point. The point is their vet can say everything is fine and recommend they purchase the puppy. We send their shot records, what brand was used, and so forth, so the vet knows exactly what has happened with that puppy.

The vet will usually tell them to bring the puppy back for a checkup in three or four weeks, and he wants to sell the person every vitamin on his shelves, a protein enhancer, and then they will call us in a couple of weeks and say, "My dog can hardly get up." We ask, "What have you been feeding him?" They say, "What you told us to feed him." And when we ask, "Is there anything else you are giving him?" "Well, yes, we have all of these bottles of stuff from the vet." These dogs cannot take high protein. Protein supplements will cripple the dogs.

Carol: One woman had her dog

still on puppy food at eight months when I'd told her to take him off it at four months, and he was high in the rear.

Marty: Years ago, we fed Sturdy. It was the cheapest thing on the market, and in those days they made it out of regular beef, and we didn't have all those additives in beef that we do today to make it bad. They all did well on it after they got out of the puppy stage.

Carol: We found out ours had a wheat allergy so we were on lamb and rice, and now we are on turkey and barley.

Marty: Anything that is hot, like wheat or corn, gives them a skin problem. It isn't just our dogs or our breed, but everybody is the same way.

Carol: Raja's sister itched and itched and when they told me what they were feeding her, I told them it was too much wheat. Even the little snack crackers are wheat. I told them to cut it out. The vet, an old a friend of ours, said that 98 percent of the skin problems in dogs are caused by the diet.

Marty: Skin problems can be bad if you let them get away from you. We have our dogs in every night and look them all over every night. We keep an eye on them, and if there is some problem developing, they don't get anymore chew bones, no more cookies. They just get their dog food. Every time we have a litter and keep one, we say, "All you are going to get is dog food," but it won't last.

Carol: Iams is supposed to have a rice and lamb biscuit. We asked at the store and the lady said she couldn't keep it on the shelves because it went out so fast.

Do you cull?

Carol: Not unless there is something drastically wrong.

Marty: If there was a cleft palate, but you would find that out right after birth. We won't cull for color or anything like that. There are people out there who want a Bernese Mountain Dog, and I am not going to throw something away just because it does not have the right colors. The people who want a Mountain Dog don't care what color it is. They know the dog's disposition and it's what they want. The disposition in most of the dogs is the same. They are good children's dogs, good house dogs, beautiful family dogs, and they don't drool like a Saint Bernard, and they are the right size. They want something like a Newfoundland, but they don't want something that big. We don't cull unless there is something wrong with them to begin with.

Do you sell your pets with spay/neuter agreements?

Marty: They can have the papers after the dogs are spayed or neutered.

Have you ever used the new limited registration?

Marty: No. We haven't had a litter in a while, and they just started that.

Do you ever get puppies back when you sell a bitch?

Marty: We never have. In the first place, there haven't been that many out, and the people who usually buy the bitches are breeders themselves. We like to know where our bitches go. Some of them might end up in Japan, and we have to watch that. We usually sit down with the person long before the puppies come and decide whether that person should have one.

Are they looking for the Bernese now in Japan?

Marty: We have had friends approached. Katherine, Bear's owner, and also Quincy's owners have been approached. You'd be surprised who is watching outside the rings. They can probably tell you the pedigrees on the dogs that are winning, and they may approach someone for a puppy from that breeding or for the animal itself. It seems like it is an endless amount of money they can offer.

At what age do you place your puppies?

Marty: At seven or eight weeks.

Carol: That's the best bonding time for them. I understand Switzerland doesn't let theirs go until they are ten weeks old.

Marty: Unless you have a lot of people coming and going, to keep a litter that long and socialize it would be difficult.

Carol: We let one go at five weeks because the people begged us so for it, and they called the next morning and said, "Can we bring this puppy back for a couple of weeks?" (laughter) We told them it was too young, but they wouldn't believe us.

Marty: I can't really see how they can socialize them. You have a group that are all brothers and sisters, and no matter how many people come back and forth through here, it still is not the same as the dog being by itself with its new family. They might love everybody that walks in and crawl into someone's lap, but the brothers and sisters are right with them. If you wait until they are ten weeks old, that seems like it would be a lot harder.

Carol: These puppies are very sensitive. They know when somebody is going to buy them. I get one all bathed and ready to go, and when the people come in, it knows something is going on and it won't be as friendly. They will all come running when you call "Puppy, puppy, puppy," but then they see there is an extra pair of legs there, and they will go someplace and sit. As soon as the person is gone, they all play again.

What are you feeding your dogs now?

Carol: We're between Nutro's Lamb and Rice and also the ProPlan Turkey and Barley.

What is the protein content on the Turkey and Barley?

Carol: It's 25 percent, I think, and 21 on the Lamb and Rice.

Marty: When you go into a feed store and start looking at the packages, some of them are 27 and 28 percent.

Do you do any kind of supplementation?

Carol: Just vitamin C. They get their ester C everyday. It's a new vitamin C that doesn't have the acid in it, so it's easier on their stomachs.

How do you condition your dogs?

Marty: We have a quarter acre out back. Everything here is fenced with cyclone fence so we don't have to worry about any of the dogs. There are various gates, and you can put them in different places, but there is no way for them to get to the street. When they want to exercise, they go out in back, and generally, the bigger ones are let out one at a time, because we've had problems with one running into the other and then back to the vet we go.

Carol: Opal collided with one when the puppies were five weeks old, and pulled all the ligaments loose. I took her in and the vet said, "She sure pulled a number on this." I said, "It wasn't her, it was Raja." He'd hit her in the side.

Marty: Raja and Satin will play in our front room. We have a big round bean bag they lie on, and they won't really roughhouse, they will just play, but we have learned our lesson about letting more than one of the larger ones out in the backyard.

Carol: We will let Raja go out with the old girl, because she's such an old crank, she just growls at him and he stays away.

Marty: Right now, we keep it mowed and it is relatively smooth and there are no ridges or anything where they could fall and hurt themselves.

Carol: The puppies go out and play, and when they are tired, they lie down.

Marty: We have no forced exercise on puppies. We try to tell the people who buy them the same thing. If you go jogging, they will jog with you, because that's the nature of the beast, and they will go until they drop because you are going. Some puppies will go outside and play, play, play, and others will go out and play for a few minutes, then come back in and lie down. If you took that one and did with it the same as you did with one that was hyperactive, you would ruin it, because they know their limitations, you don't. We just let them do whatever they want.

Carol: You wouldn't take your six-month-old baby out and run it up and down the street, so why would you want to do it with a puppy?

When showing this breed, how much grooming should be done?

Marty: It isn't like a Sammy that is all one color, where you have to powder and trim them so every hair lies straight. If you weren't showing them, these guys only need to be bathed once a year, or once every six months at the most. They can go out and get full of mud, and if you don't touch them and just let it dry, you can use your slicker brush, it all comes out, and they will be just as white and black as they ever were. There is not that much grooming. To show the adults, we like to trim their whiskers. People say they don't look natural, but they sure look clean, and that's good for the judges who like a clean look. I think it looks cleaner. Raja's all go in different directions. That's about all there is, bathing, brushing and trimming the feet, and cleaning the ears, which is normally done with a washcloth when they are given a bath. We use a blower to dry them. It depends on how fluffy you want them, how big you want them to look.

Do you have any problems with keeping males and females together?

Marty: No, there is no problem. Long ago, when both Aquarius and BT were alive, they got into it one day and it was quite severe, but they were just putting each other in their place. After it was over, that was the end of it. I wouldn't go away and leave them in the pen by themselves, but as long as they were in the house, they didn't growl at one another.

Carol: Our females have always gotten along. There are a couple of people in our club who have had problems with their females, but both these females are supposed to be bred, so maybe they are trying to be dominant.

Marty: There has to be a subordinate and a dominant. That's why some people want two males. That's okay, but you have to watch them. Say you have a three-year-old, and you bring home a puppy. He loves that puppy, licks it and they play together. Eventually, though, that puppy will grow up. The bigger dog says, "Hey, this keeps getting bigger all the time." The point comes when they must straighten it out between them who is boss, and once they do that, generally, you don't have any problem.

I showed Aquarius, and Carol showed BT, and we were at a show somewhere where they had cow pens, though it wasn't the Cow Palace. We were walking up the aisle to the showring, and there were a group of people who were standing there. One had Collies. Carol had BT and was going ahead, and Aquarius and I were a few lengths behind. The Collie nipped BT in the rear as he went by. Aquarius said, "You can't bite him!" and as we were coming up just behind Carol and BT, Aquarius' mouth came down over the beak of that Collie. The owner pulled the Collie away quickly enough that he didn't come down hard on its muzzle. It happened so quickly, I didn't realize what was going on. I didn't think about Aquarius retaliating like that, because he wasn't that way, but he didn't want anything like that to happen to BT. (laughter)

What advice would you give to other breeders who want to start out in the breed?

Carol: Do a lot of studying and research.

Marty: Everybody is different in what they are looking for. Study the thing out. Find a breeder who breeds the particular type you want, and then do a little research on it. Find out what you want to do and then go ahead and do it, but don't just go out and buy a female from this person and a male from that person and decide to have puppies. No matter what your reasons are for breeding, it should be thought out beforehand thoroughly as to what type of dog you want, and then you must do your research on it. Do you plan on showing and keeping some or just breeding them or what? You have to have some kind of destination as to where you are going. Some people don't realize all that is involved in having a litter of puppies, and the problems that can come up. Some people think it's just boom, boom, boom and it's done.

Carol: It would be nice if it was that way, but it isn't. They should go into it thinking of all the problems beforehand and make all their arrangements accordingly.

Marty: Twenty years ago, everything was cheaper, so the veterinarian bills were not that high. We used to pay $150 for a C-section, but now look what you pay for one.

Carol: One guy has Raja's sister and wants to breed her, and he says he wants to have a puppy fund, an "in case" fund. It would consist of how much to put away in case there is a C-section or any extra medical stuff, so he is going at it right.

Marty: If you don't need it, save it for the next time or use it on something else.

Carol: When a dog is x-rayed, our vet told us it takes about two years for that radiation to get out of the dogs' systems.

Marty: When you have the hips done, if they take more than one plate, you have to figure out how much this will all take, especially in males. They don't use a lead apron like they do with people, but when you think about how you are trying to hold the dog in the unnatural position on its back and trying to pull its legs down straight, who is going to put a lead covering on them?

Aren't they anesthetized?

Marty: No, not unless they need it.

Carol: Or a sedative.

Marty: The reason is they are too relaxed. It loosens the ligaments, the muscle mass around it. When the dog is stacked up and they have the weight on the legs where it is supposed to be, they can shoot and see what the hips are at that time. A good vet can darned near get an OFA, depending on how many plates you want run over your dog, unless the joint is really out of place.

Carol: You wonder what damage they are doing to it by pulling on it the way they do. They are supposed to be coming out with a new X-ray where they shoot down.

Marty: Generally, the vets who do this quite a bit know how hard to pull. When he took the X-ray for this dog, I have never seen a dog so straight. That spine was straight, clear from the pelvis to the top of his neck. It was perfect as far as that part was concerned.

Should a novice person go to the kennel with the big winners to purchase a pup?

Marty: No. Big winners don't mean a thing, and you will pay twice as much for your dog, because if their champion winner has been bred to another champion winner, they are going to want more money for their puppies. That's human nature. It's like the difference between the top ten handlers and the bottom 50. You are going to get more money at the top than at the bottom of that scale. If a handler is in the low 50's, people won't pay that handler the same as if he/she were among the top five handlers. It's the same with stud dogs or buying puppies. I would advise them to buy from a reputable breeder, period.

Carol: And get a good contract.

Marty: If you buy from a reputable breeder who has good stock, you are better off than if you buy from someone whose dog has 40 Bests in Show, and who thinks the dog, therefore, is worth more money.

Is it helpful to join the national club, a local breed club or an all breed club?

Carol: Yes. When you get into a local club, you get more information on the breed, and they usually have seminars where you can learn even more, especially if you are a novice just starting out. Our club has handling seminars and we are having a grooming seminar coming up, and Marty has had a carting seminar, and they also have the Canine Good Citizen. We have a herding thing, too.

Marty: They use sheep. A novice dog could be hurt with cows, and you can't nip ducks in the heel like you can sheep.

They used to do pigs, but they got to be too dangerous, so they stopped using them.

Marty: Pigs can be mean.

Does the national club do enough to educate new members?

Marty: Yes. There is a packet sent out. With the national club, you get the national newsletter, which has local things, as well as what is going around the country.

Carol: I am a charter member, and every time I register a puppy, I get a letter saying, "Welcome to the breed, and have a good time with your new Bernese Mountain Dog!" (laughter)

Does AKC have a video on this breed?

Carol: Yes.

Is it a good one?

Carol: Yes.

What about books and magazines? Is there adequate literature available in the breed?

Marty: There is now.

Carol: One of our friends from Switzerland, who had one of our puppies, brought back the only book he could find there on the breed. He brought it back, and we had it translated and donated it to the club when the national first started many years ago.

Is there a breed book in this country?

Carol: Yes, there are two or three now.

Marty: When we had this one translated, we had it made into booklet form. They wrote and got permission to do it. A German friend of mine and his wife translated it, but they don't know doggy terms, and some of it was written kind of backwards, but we figured out what it was after they had translated it. We made it into booklets and the national club used it for quite some time until more information was available. That was a problem during the '60's. There was not that much literature.

Carol: There was nothing on the breed itself, not even statues or anything like that.

Marty: We have more now than we ever had – like the Stone Brothers and everybody. Everybody has everything to do with Mountain Dogs now. Twenty years ago, it was, "What breed?" "Well, we have this Newf if you want to cut it down."

We have a little statue in there that is actually a Saint Bernard that Carol ground down and made a little smaller.

Carol: The first time Satin saw it, she looked and looked at it and sniffed, because it looks just like a little puppy sitting there. (laughter) When we watched Westminster, she was watching those dogs.

Marty: When we have a videotape in of the dogs, she sits right there and watches.

Carol: At every dog show, we get the tape.

Marty: We used to take eight-millimeter movies of the shows. I started out with a crank Brownie camera. That's how long ago it was. I finally bought a good one, an expensive electric one. I've got about 7,000 feet in movie film. I have canisters of it. There is 500 feet to a spool.

Carol: We want to put them on video.

Marty: Then I got a video and now I have tons of videotape, too.

How long have you lived here?

Marty: For 32 years right here in this house. Carol was born and raised in California, right here in Santa Rosa. I came here from Ohio in 1947. I worked for Willys making jeeps. I came out here right after I graduated from high school. I worked for them beginning in 1945, and went to school, too. I saved my money and brought my folks along to California. I've been here ever since, and I loved it here in the beginning. This town was such a nice town.

Has it changed a lot?

Carol: Oh, yes. It's getting bigger and bigger.

Marty: When we bought this place 32 years ago, it was still under construc-

Ch. Car-Mar's A-Miss V. Copyright CD.

tion, and all that was here was walnuts and prunes, and now look at it. We have 750 homes here in the park. It was an old walnut ranch that they eventually didn't do anything with anymore, and it was great. There was nothing at the end of the road where you come in, and we used to walk our dogs there. It was all open fields.

What have you done for a living?

Marty: I was an automobile and truck mechanic for 50 years. When I started, I said I was going to work for 50 years, and win, lose or draw, that would be it. I wanted to retire at 64, but I had to take a voluntary retirement at 62 or be fired. I thought it would be easy to get another job for a couple of years, but it wasn't. It's not because I am not qualified, but because of insurance. If they would have kept me at my previous job, with the new plan they had purchased, it would have cost them $35 extra on each of the men, because they were all under 40 years of age. Everything over 40 goes up. Because I was 62, it would have raised their rates $35 for each man, and if the company paid 50 percent, and the men paid 50 percent, that was almost $20 out of their paychecks. If I wasn't there, they would save that $20 a month per man, and the company would save the balance.

Are you enjoying your retirement?

Marty: Yes. When I was working, though, and could only work here on weekends, it seems like I got a lot more done than I do now.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

Marty: They replaced our children. We have two 40-year-old teenagers, as we call them. They are like teenagers, only they are darned near 40 years old.

Are they married?

Marty: No. You can't be married and have antique cars and boats.

I enjoy the dogs. They mind us and we never have any problem with them. Some stay in the house and some stay outside. We've had people whose homes have been broken into around here, but nobody has touched this place. Why break into a place that has noise makers when they can go to another place that doesn't have any dogs at all?

Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

Carol: No.

Marty: I think we've covered a lot more than was necessary already. (laughter)

Has it been worth it, being in dogs all these years?

Carol: Oh, yes.

Marty: I wouldn't have any other breed. If I live long enough, I would like to write a book about them. They are like little people. If you get upset and yell at them, they all fall apart, so the best thing to do if you are frustrated about something is to come into the house, forget about it and do it the next day.

Carol: They are trying so hard to please you that they don't understand if you become impatient or upset with them.

Marty: We had jumps and everything set up out here and I took a whole film of a bitch going through it all and she never made a mistake.

Carol: We can always show it to the judge.

Marty: That's what I said we should do, because she can do it. At the show, though, she would run around something or balk at it. She would run at it, and you would think, "Oh, boy, here she comes," and she would go around the edge of it. (laughter) I tried to train Aquarius, and he had his CD. I put up the jumps one day, and he said, "I don't want to jump over this, and I don't want to jump over the broad jump." The first thing I tried was the high jump, and in those days we had to jump 36 inches, but I didn't have it that high. I only had three or four boards in it. I decided to try one board and then work up to three or four boards, which was only eighteen inches. I had three boards down, and he put his head down and went through it like a goat and tore the boards all to pieces. (laughter)

One night it was getting towards dusk, and I had the field split off for the sheep and he went out in the back to do his thing, and when he was through, he was coming back to me full bore. I said, "Look out for the fence!" and he left the ground and went right over the fence, so he could jump! (laughter) I tried him on the broad jump, and all he did was go up on all four feet and come down on two of the cross pieces and smashed them. We gave up on CDX work. (laughter) He would chase a dumbbell and bring it back – sometimes. He knew we weren't going to get after him. You could see it in his face. It has to be a game, just as it does if you want a good cart dog.

Thank you both for doing the interview. It's been very enjoyable.

Carol: It's been fun.

Marty: I love to talk about dogs. •

YOU KNOW, WE HAVEN'T BEEN GETTING THE GAS MILEAGE WE USED TO
Kellie Lewis

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Julia and Elizabeth Crawford
WYEMEDE
Delmar, Maryland

This interview was conducted at the home of Julia and Elizabeth Crawford in January of 1995 by Barb Matson.

How long have you been in dogs?

Julia: A lifetime. Our mother and father were both dog people as far as always having a pet. We always had a dog from the time I was born. I was the one who wanted to have dogs for breeding and showing. My sister, Elizabeth, who is eight years younger than I am, developed and interest early on. It has been a lifelong involvement.

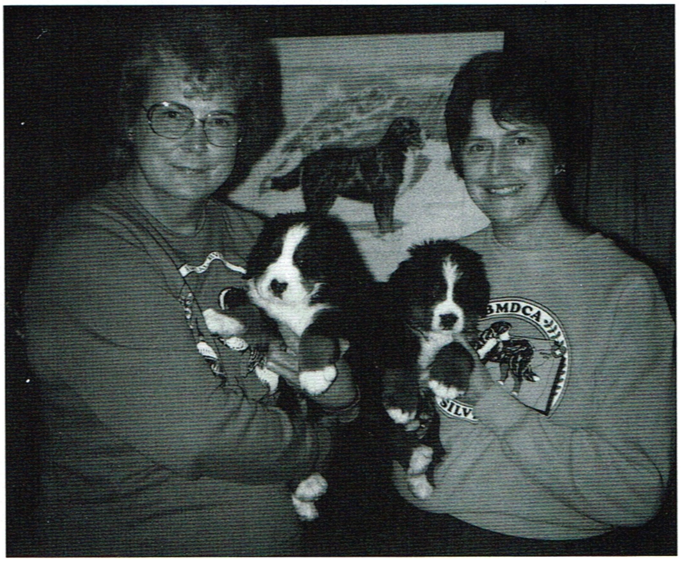
When did you develop the interest in showing and breeding?

Julia: I showed my first dog at the age of ten at the Mason-Dixon Collie Club Match on July 4, 1947, where I won with my Collie puppy, Bonnie, Best Puppy in Match. I was hooked from that point on.

Elizabeth: My first time in the show ring was at the 1951 Orlando KC dog show in Junior Showmanship where I showed a Miniature Pinscher. I still have the little trophy that I won.

How long have you been in Bernese Mountain Dogs?

Julia: We got our first Bernese in 1968. The dog came from the state of Washington. We literally had to buy a Bernese to see one although we had been going to numerous dog shows. At that point, the breed was completely unknown, other than being an AKC recognized breed. There was a Berner in New York state, but we never saw it at any of the shows we attended. As a youngster in Missouri I had received a book of dogs from our grandparents. It included an artist's representation of a Bernese with a description of the breed. I was intrigued then, but the *Kansas City Star's* dog ads never listed them. Back in those days, the newspaper, *Dog World* and dog shows were the only sources our family knew. Bernese were not to enter our lives then. An awareness of this mysterious breed surfaced again when our continuing search for just the right breed caused us to seriously evaluate our expectations in a breed and our goals. By that time, we were already experienced in many different breeds, yet a sense of fulfillment eluded us. Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* could be likened to our decision to turn from popular breeds to a rare breed. He wrote, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." It was our mother who resolved the dilemma of risking a new breed without ever seeing it as well as risking buying a puppy from such a great distance. She announced, "I think we ought to get the Bernese Mountain Dog. I would hate to die without ever having seen one." When that shipping crate door came open, it was love at first sight and it has been a love story ever since. Our search for the perfect breed ended. The dog we got from Washington didn't turn out for breeding, but that same year a puppy was born that became our foundation bitch. We purchased her from Harold and Sylvia Howison of Michigan. She was the daughter of OFA Bernese Mountain Dog number one, Ch. Wendy v.d. Grasburg. Our foundation bitch became Ch. Wyemede's Marta von Sablemate.



How many litters have you bred?

Elizabeth: We've bred quite a number of Bernese litters over the years. The number has varied from year to year and sometimes we have had no puppies at all. Some litters have been one or two puppies. The maximum we have ever had in litter size was twelve, but that's unusual.

Does any of those litters stand out in your mind as having been the best?

Julia: Of course, the most exciting litter that one has is the first. Though not our first litter in dogs, our first Bernese litter started with a natural birth and ended in a C-section, with three born naturally and only one surviving from the C-section for seven remaining puppies. No one knew then that Bernese are subject to uterine inertia. From that litter came two champions.

Elizabeth: It was the first Bernese litter born in the state of Florida and the first south of the Mason-Dixon line. That was June, 1970. Florida was our summer residence and Maryland our winter home.

Julia: The litter that probably stands out the most was a litter that was born in 1976. In that litter was Ch. Wyemede's Luron Bruce who has had a significant impact on the breed as far as the production of the winners at National Specialties. He is still the subject of linebreeding. He was an extremely fine example of the breed. The combination that produced Bruce was done twice with a total of five champions.

Do you have any idea how many champions have been in the litters you have bred?

Elizabeth: We've had quite a few. Chalking up champions is not a priority. Our dogs are first companions, then show dogs.

What is the best dog you have ever owned or bred?

Julia: As a dog we bred, Bruce is

the dog that I would say was one of the best. He was owned by Claudia Buss in Wisconsin who did very well by him. He was used very judiciously for breeding with some outstanding quality resulting.

Elizabeth: Conformation-wise and in terms of contributions to the breed, Bruce would be the dog. However, it seems a shame to limit it to the best, because others have been best for other qualities.

What about your biggest winner?

Elizabeth: We have been very conservative in our showing what with being financially limited by being school teachers. We have never campaigned a special. As far as all the dogs we've had, our biggest winner was a Labrador Retriever, who was Winners Bitch at the 1972 Labrador Retriever National Specialty from the Bred-by class. Another highlight for us was having Best of Winners at the 1986 English Toy Spaniel National Specialty, also from Bred-by. Getting a placement in the Toy Group with an ETS and one with a Borzoi in the Hound Group were very special occasions. In Bernese we count as very precious some fabulous five-point majors, including those at supported entries and one at the AKC Centennial Dog Show from Bred-by. That same day we won a five-point major with our English Toy Spaniel. With two five-point majors, it didn't take any gasoline to drive from Philadelphia home! (laughter) We were flying!

Julia: Of the nineteen BMDCA National Specialties as of 1994, I've attended seventeen, but only had entries at six due to difficulties in travel arrangements for dogs from here for the other specialties.

Can the pedigrees in Bernese Mountain Dogs be trusted as to accuracy?

Julia: I have no reason to feel distrust. In fact, I have a great deal of confidence in what was and is being done. The BMDCA's bylaws state, under "discipline," "Any member may prefer charges against a member for alleged misconduct prejudicial to the best interests of the Club or the breed." This certainly includes misrepresentation of predigrees. The AKC can and will become involved in the interest of accuracy.

How have you used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when should each be used?

Julia: Linebreeding is fine, but only

Elizabeth Crawford with, left to right: Lake Haus Faith of Wyemede, age ten months; Wyemede's Zoe v Aar Karla, age five months; Wyemede's What A Beauty, age twelve months. Each traces direct descent from Wyemede foundation bitch Wyemede's Marta von Sablemate in the sixth or seventh generation.

Ch. Wyemede's Luron Bruce (Ch. Maximilian v. Nesselacker x Wyemede's Sablemate Siren) at seven months.

if it can be done on quality and soundness. We have utilized linebreeding on that basis. As far as inbreeding, there are so many problems that inbreeding can cause that we don't think it is justifiable in the breed at this point. With outstanding type you can get the very finest, but you may also end up with some serious health problems. Our experience with English Toys enlightened us as to both sides of the coin.

Elizabeth: In regards to outcrossing, we feel it is very worthwhile. We have a limited gene pool in Bernese Mountain Dogs and when you outcross you can broaden the gene pool, thereby making it possible to go back into the line with an infusion of new blood. Judicious outcrossing can be instrumental in improving longevity as well as general health. If you know what you are dealing with in an outcross, consistency in type can be realized.

When would you say that the type started to become more uniform?

Julia: It was in the late 1970's that type became more uniform. Early on, we could see uniformity when we would get together with families of dogs. There were certain lines you could identify, but there was often a wide range in size. While the standard's range has narrowed, disparity in size is still with us.

Is there anyone or anything that you would say has influenced your breeding the most?

Julia: The "anyone" would be some wonderful mentors over what is coming close to 50 years. We still rely a great deal upon the wisdom of trusted friends.

Elizabeth: The "anything" is a strong commitment to breed structurally and mentally sound dogs. Without that, type is worthless.

How would you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

Julia: Really, those three considerations should be given equal importance.

How many dogs do you keep now?

Elizabeth: We have fourteen dogs, including one Tibetan Mastiff and one English Toy Spaniel. Some of our dogs are older and retired. We rotate them all in the house and for walking so that they do have a sense of being very special. With their living quarters being a walk-in kennel attached to the house, we feel quite close to them. They seem to be very happy, and they give us wonderful companionship.

What is the most dogs you have ever had at one time?

Julia: Probably eighteen at some point in time. We really started with having dogs, as far as a kennel situation back in the early 1950's in Florida, although our involvement had intensified in the late 1940's.

Elizabeth: When the number was high, we had several English Toy Spaniels and an English Toy Spaniel does not take up the space of a Bernese Mountain Dog! (laughter) It was number of heads then, but not volume.

Will you explain how you chose your kennel name, Wyemede?

Julia: It is a coined name, with the first part coming from the Wye Oak, the oldest white oak in the United States which is located on the Eastern Shore of Maryland where we live. The white oak is the state tree, with the Wye Oak, located near the Wye River, exemplifying its choice. The mighty strength and sturdiness of the oak with its deep roots symbolize what we hoped our dogs would offer for the future. The world "wye" also means "three." This seemed fitting, as Wyemede originally represented a threesome – Julia, Elizabeth, and our mother, Frances. The second part of the name "mede," is the Old English word for "meadow." The flat to gently rolling land of the Eastern Shore might be likened to one vast meadow, interspersed here and there with woods. Hence, "Wyemede," which was eventually registered with AKC in 1974.

Have you named your litters by any sort of scheme?

Elizabeth: For quite a number of years, we didn't, and then we decided we would adhere to the Swiss tradition of letter naming.

What distinguishes your line?

Julia: I would say good temperament, soundness with in-depth OFA background, and quality of type.

Elizabeth: Also, we don't have just "a" line. We bring in fresh blood.

What is your long-range goal in breeding dogs?

Julia: It has always been to strive constantly for improvement.

What is your interpretation of ideal conformation for the Bernese?

Julia: Ideal conformation is the bringing together as an organized whole idealness in type, structure, gait and temperament as presented in the standard of excellence for the breed while maintaining continued vigilance for the preservation of the hallmark of the breed, its beautiful markings.

Could you talk about the front and the rear in more detail?

Julia: Solid, straight front legs

characterize the standing dog. The front legs in motion sould move in towards the center line as the dog comes toward us at a trot, with no elbowing, paddling or weaving. The rear should have strong, straight hocks with the stifle being moderately bent. In going away, the rear legs should be moving straight with no indication of the hocks turning in. With increased speed the legs tend to converge towards the center line.

Why do some dogs look good standing and posing, but not good moving?

Julia: A dog that is standing still can be stacked for optimum appearance. Hands on can often reveal deviations that the eye does not detect. This is true in all breeds. The reason for not looking good when in motion has to do with the dog's structure and the way he is put together. Correct motion is a harmonious combination of neck, topline, body, forequarters and hindquarters. Deviations from the ideal in any of these area can result in poor movement. In assessing gait, it is important to remember that it should be viewed at a slow trot. A Bernese should not be moved like a German Shepherd.

How serious are missing teeth?

Elizabeth: If it is just one missing tooth and the dog is absolutely outstanding in every other respect, I don't feel it should be discarded from a breeding program. We need to be aware of it with very selective breeding choices being made to avoid doubling up on the fault. Offspring should be followed to determine if the dog should continue to be used.

How important is pigment?

Julia: It certainly has to be considered. The only reference to pigment in the standard is in regards to the nose being black. Puppies are born with pink noses. They may still have a spot of pink around the nostrils by eight weeks and sometimes up until six months, but that is very rare. The white muzzle band may have pink blotches beneath, just as the lips and area below the nose might show some pink. Footpads likewise may be mottled with pink. As long as Bernese remain a tri-colored breed, some pink mottling as described can occur in varying degrees due to the white.

What is the relationship of the chest depth to the rest of the dog?

Elizabeth: I like to see the chest at least to the elbow with its being below that in a well-matured dog.

INSULATION

Ch. Nor-Ham's Christophe v Wyemede.

Is coat very important to winning in the ring?

Elizabeth: It is an integral part of the appearance of the dog. Grooming has become a more important part of the preparation for the show ring in that we are seeing dogs that are blown dry so the coat stands out. According to the standard, the breed should be shown in natural coat with no undue trimming. In actuality, nearly everyone is using high powered blowers to get more out of the coat. It can't be denied that it does make them look good, but it isn't natural.

Will you describe the correct topline, and how much of it is for function and how much for beauty?

Julia: The topline should be level. It is an essential component in transmitting strong, powerful drive from the rear. A level topline is part of the overall balance typical of an ideal specimen. Beauty in any breed is associated with correctness according to the standard. Interestingly enough, the first Bernese registered with AKC in 1937 had an absolutely beautiful, level topline. His picture was compared 50 years later with a Bernese of 1987 and the two pictures look as if one were placed over the other, the level toplines would match.

What are the ideal heights for dogs and bitches?

Julia: Heights are established by the standard. Measured at the withers, dogs are 25 to 27 1/2 inches; bitches are 23 to 26 inches.

What is the ideal ear and earset?

Elizabeth: The ears should be triangular in shape and come forward when alert so the top of the ear is level with the skull. When a Bernese is in repose, you can't tell whether they have a good earset or not. It is very important when training a Bernese for the ring that it be able to show off its ears so the judge can see the earset.

What is an ideal foot?

Julia: It should be a nice, round, compact foot. I like to see them stand right up on their feet with well-arched toes.

Will you describe the temperament more fully?

Julia: Bernese are extremely devoted to their family, with their being enthusiastic, but not overactive. You can come in, the dog greets you as the most wonderful person in the world. After the greeting is over, the dog will go and lie down and let you go about your business. If you want the dog to be with you, it is ready anytime. They are laid-back, for the most part. Both males and females can show some reserve with strangers.

Elizabeth: Bernese are excellent with children, and they can sense an older person's need for a dog to be more gentle. They seem to have an almost uncanny perception as to how to behave with different people.

Are there any other serious faults you would add to those already mentioned?

Julia: The standard is the criteria for identifying faults. One of the most serious to deal with is an underbite, because it seldom shows up until the dog is over six months old, sometimes later. If either one of the parents or any of the grandparents has an underbite, it is impossible to tell at eight weeks of age if it will develop later. An overbite will be visible before six or seven weeks.

Are you happy with the standard?

Julia: We're very happy with it. A great deal of care and effort went into the revisions of the standard. It gives the right direction for where the breed should be going. The range in size recognizes the differences we have genetically. What we have is good.

Is there anything about it that you would like to see changed?

Julia: No. Not at this point in time.

Should there be disqualifications?

Julia: There are disqualifications for a blue eye and for any ground color other than black, both of which are very justifiable.

Should champions be specialed?

Elizabeth: That should be a matter of individual preference. Finances must be considered, as well as whether the dog is truly worthy. Certainly, special competition at National and Regional Specialties should draw a big entry as a showcase of type.

Does making the Top Ten or Twenty mean anything?

Julia: It means something to the people who do it. It is an exhilarating feeling to have a dog that weekend after weekend has the sparkle and quality to bring home the ribbons. However, a top winner may not be a top producer or vice versa. When a dog is a top winner, whether it has achieved that because of its quality or because of extensive campaigning and media exposure, it is more likely to be considered for breeding. A breeder who is selecting a dog to use or a purchaser who is buying a puppy should be careful to base his/her selection on the actual quality of the dog and on its get or offspring. The dog should measure up to what it truly offers the breed, not just on how much it has achieved.

Ch. Maximilian v. Nesselacker.

Would further popularization help or harm the breed?

Julia: Popularization always has the potential for being harmful. It must be kept in check by breeders through education. Careful screening of buyers is essential as are sales agreements that stipulate any restrictions the seller has. Limited registration needs more utilization. Co-ownership is also being used as a safeguard. However, in some instances, the use of co-ownership under the guise of protecting the breed can inure to the breeder a fat purchase price as well as extensive control with unusual demands over the dog's showing and breeding at the purchaser's additional expense. In those situations, popularity is being exploited by the breeder.

How fair is judging?

Elizabeth: I think it is fair. Attributing losing to unfair judging is often a cop-out by the inexperienced or poor loser. When honest quality has been passed over, it may have been the result of inferior presentation of the dog at the time the judge was examining and looking at the dog. Judges do not have the continuous panorama view that spectators have. If you are not happy with a judge, then don't go back under that judge.

Would you rather show under an all breed judge or a breeder-judge?

Elizabeth: Either one, really.

Julia: Wins under a breeder-judge are cherished and very meaningful.

Does advertising influence judges?

Julia: I am sure it must. The marketing industry bases its success on just that. By the same token, there have been some beautiful wins that have happened with no advertising whatsoever.

Does a big-name handler help a dog win?

Elizabeth: Probably. Their handling skills are sufficient to give the winning edge. However, one has to remember that a big-name handler is interested enough in his/her reputation to restrict acceptance to only those dogs that are worthy enough.

Is it ever ethical to retouch advertising photographs?

Elizabeth: Any touching up should not alter the dog itself, period. As long as the dog looks as the real dog truly looks, that's fine.

When you have occasionally used handlers, was it because you were not available to go to a show, or did you use a handler for some other reason?

Julia: Really, not being available to go to certain shows where majors were anticipated was a significant factor. In all our years with dogs, only three have ever been given over to handlers and those were because of logistics or our own physical limitations at the time.

Have you ever handled for others?

Elizabeth: Just to take a dog in to help someone out, and we have only done that rarely.

How do you train puppies, and at what age?

Julia: Training starts as soon as they are born with plenty of handling consistent with their age.

Elizabeth: We make it fun for the puppies. They receive lots of love and affection, with gentle corrections when needed. They learn the meaning of "no." Lots of toys and a variety of experiences are provided to develop their minds and confidence. When puppies leave us, we encourage their being taken to puppy kindergarten.

Julia: One should carefully investigate the type of training procedure being used, as well as the qualifications of the instructors. We are hearing more and more emphasis by some puppy trainers on rewarding with food. The one area that may warrant rewarding with food is for coming when called. Constantly supplying a tidbit for doing something is poor practice. Verbal praise is much better than giving food. It gives the dog a false reason for behaving.

What has been your experience with obedience training?

Julia: We are great believers in obedience and have put CDs on some of our dogs. We've assisted with obedience instruction at our local kennel club. Certainly, the Bernese is a dog that can function very well without obedience training because they seem to do just what you want. They are so easygoing and so quick to learn the routines of the household that people will say, "I don't need to obedience train my dog because he does everything I want him to do anyway." However, formal training is very valuable for the owner as well as the dog. We heartily recommend it. It always pleases us when we have a dog whose pedigree includes obedience titles because it underscores biddability.

Overall, how would you compare the Bernese Mountain Dog's intelligence with other breeds?

Elizabeth: I feel that our competency in addressing that question is substantial. Over the years, we have owned 28 different breeds of dogs. Bernese are highly intelligent and their desire to please is unbounded. One of the beauties of purebred dogs is that each breed was developed for a specific purpose with a high degree of intelligence being sought in the working expectations for that breed.

Ch. Wyemede's Dorli von Butik.

Is it appropriate to take a dog anywhere off-leash?

Julia: I don't think a dog should be off-leash unless it is fully obedience trained with formal obedience in the presence of unfamiliar dogs. Even then, it should only be done under the most secure conditions of safety for the dog and for other people.

How important is training to winning in conformation?

Elizabeth: Show training has to be there in order for the dog to be presented properly. It is as important for the handler as it is for the dog.

Can shy or aggressive dogs be corrected through training?

Julia: Yes. Training out shyness or a bad temperament is possible, but don't use the dog for breeding.

Do you have any specific advice for owners who want to handle their own dogs?

Elizabeth: Go to handling classes where instruction is being given by a knowledgeable handler. Sanctioned matches are terrific for practice. Go to shows and watch the best handlers in all breeds. Group judging is a real showcase for expert handling. Periodically, look at and critique videos of yourself. Work with another person and be prepared to take suggestions.

Could you give a little historical background on what the Bernese has been bred to do?

Julia: They were bred to pull carts, to herd farm animals, to be guardians of the property, and to be companions. They were used to pull milk and cheese carts in Switzerland. The Berner would go up into the mountains where the herds are sent in the summertime. A younger member of the family would stay in a cabin nearby to tend the cows while the lower pastures were used in summer for the growing and cutting of hay for winter use. Daily milking would continue and the dog would bring the milk cart down by itself or with the attendant to the farm. The cans would be unloaded and the dog would be sent back up the mountain, either alone or accompanied. The BMDCA has a draft test which calls for the dog pulling a cart to perform with a handler the type of tasks that would have been used by the working Berner.

Have you ever been involved in any of these events?

Julia: Only as a spectator. We are

great believers in giving dogs an opportunity to do the work they were bred to do. It's lots of fun.

How controlled are your matings?

Elizabeth: Very controlled. How much we assist depends on the female and whether she has been bred before or if it is her first breeding. We are always present and ever mindful that it is very easy for either one of the dogs to accidentally hurt the other. Once a breeding is complete, each is kenneled separately with plenty of water to rest quietly for an hour afterwards. They remain separate from each other and breedings are no sooner than every 36 to 48 hours.

What is a fair stud fee?

Julia: A stud fee should be commensurate with the quality of the dog and its achievements. There is a great deal of disparity among breeders regarding stud fees. Years ago, one Collie breeder advertised, "By Private Treaty." It is our feeling that the established stud fee should include a nominal, up-front payment to cover the care and management of the breeding with the balance being due at the time the litter registration is signed. The up-front fee entitles the bitch to one return service and if the bitch owner elects, the bitch may be taken elsewhere with no return of the initial payment. The arrangement promises two or more living puppies by the age of three weeks or a return service without additional charge would be given provided the stud fee was paid in full for the registration of the single puppy. In the event of a puppy being taken for the stud fee, the owner of the stud is given second choice of the litter or first choice of the litter if the owner of the bitch is not keeping a puppy.

Are your males at stud to outside bitches?

Julia: Yes.

Have you ever refused to service a bitch?

Elizabeth: We have been very fortunate in having had people communicate with us well in advance of breeding to discuss the possible combination. Sometimes, we have suggested that it would be best that the bitch not be used for breeding and that has been accepted.

What would be the faults that would keep you from breeding to a dog or a bitch?

Elizabeth: Failing to have clear hips, being undershot or overshot, as well as having any other serious fault or disqualifying fault stated in the standard would be sufficient reason for not breeding.

How many litters should a bitch have?

Julia: There is no rule of thumb for that. The BMDCA's Code of Ethics calls for a bitch to have passed through one season and that she be at least eighteen months of age. We feel that OFA certification should be in place at the time of breeding, which means over two years old. Breeding should not occur more than two out of three seasons, with the size of the litter whelped and the health of the bitch being carefully considered. Skipping a season between litters is ideal. As far as when to retire a bitch from the whelping box, we use six as the maximum age.

Do you help your bitches whelp?

Elizabeth: Absolutely! On one occasion we had a bitch who surprised us. She did fine, but we want to be there.

Does this breed usually have to have C-sections?

Julia: The frequency of C-sections is quite high. Often, the last puppy or two may be born dead because of prolonged labor. Sometimes it seems better to do a C-section to start with rather than waiting to the end when the bitch is exhausted and the unborn puppies are very possibly dead. It is interesting that one litter may require a C-section and another litter from that same bitch will be a natural whelping or vice versa.

Do you supplement-feed very young puppies?

Elizabeth: It depends on the size of the litter. If it is a large litter, we offer supplementation. We monitor the puppies closely to make sure the mother has enough milk and that each puppy is getting plenty. We are ready to supplement if the puppies need it.

When you do supplement, what do you use?

Elizabeth: We use Esbilac liquid or a formula that we make. At three weeks of age or a little younger, we begin offering finely mashed, well-soaked puppy food.

Do you wean the puppies yourself or let the bitch do it?

Julia: We wean them, but we provide the mother opportunities to be with her puppies for brief periods of nursing and being with her. We decide when to wean based upon litter size and how the mother is doing.

At what age do you evaluate the puppies for pet and show quality, and what do you look for?

Julia: We start from the moment they are born. The first assessment is markings, overall appearance, bone, head size, length of body, the tail, the fronts and rears, then eye color when they open, followed by an evaluation of the bite as the teeth come in. As they get older, we continue to look at those things and begin looking at movement, coat, balance, carriage and general temperament as they interact with the litter and us.

Elizabeth: Monitoring temperament is very important. We watch as to whether there is one puppy that is more dominant than the others, or one more reticent. We feel that our long-term observations of temperament over everyday contact with the puppies is far more valuable than any temperament test done with puppies at six, seven or eight weeks of age. A test cannot possibly replace the accurate picture a knowledgeable breeder has developed from watching the puppies play with each other, their toys, the human family and the strangers they meet.

Julia: Added to that is the genetic heritage of temperament. You breed for temperament, and knowing as much as possible about the dispositions behind puppies is valuable information.

Have you ever culled your larger litters?

Elizabeth: No. We have never culled litters; however, we put restrictions on pet puppies for spaying or neutering.

What should a show puppy sell for?

Julia: The price would vary, depending on the stud fee, titles and achievements accomplished by parents, OFA ratings and degree of in-depth OFA, the quality of the puppy and whatever guarantees are made. It could even vary by the area of the country. Rather than what should a show puppy sell for, I would like to address it based on what I understand to be current prices. They range from $900 to $1,000 for top-notch show puppies, with some breeders making a return back to a pet price upon proof of spaying or neutering without having been bred if a dog is dysplastic. From what I understand, there are prices that are higher than what I've stated. I also feel that a puppy is a puppy and not a puppet. It should not be controlled by a lot of strings that are very beneficial to the breeder, but questionable as to the benefits to the puppy buyer. Anyone who is seeking a puppy should carefully evaluate what is being asked by the breeder and what demands are being made and who will receive the benefits of the requirements.

Do you ever sell on terms, or is it cash only?

Elizabeth: We have sold on terms, but we don't encourage it. Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances that warrant making exceptions. It is never with any interest, but strictly to help people out. It is important to evaluate the family situation when people ask for time payment in order to determine if they are able to handle the expenses of a puppy. If they can't cope with those expenses, then it is not the time to get a puppy. It's not like purchasing an automobile. It's better if people can pay for a puppy outright.

At what age should the puppy be placed in its new home?

Elizabeth: Eight to ten weeks is a fine age.

What do you feed your dogs?

Elizabeth: We feed adults Purina Pro Plan with the addition of small amounts of Pedigree canned food to enhance flavor. A few of the dogs prefer Purina Hi Pro. Puppies are fed Iams Puppy Food until they are twelve to fourteen weeks of age. We then switch to Purina Pro Visions Turkey Barley for adults because the higher protein in puppy foods stimulates too rapid growth.

Do you use any supplements?

Elizabeth: We start our puppies on vitamin C as soon as they start eating solid food. We feel that there is a correlation between clear hips and vitamin C.

How do you condition your dogs?

Julia: They get natural exercise. We might use a bicycle for extra conditioning, but that is not a regular regimen. With spacious yards that are always accessible to the dogs, there is plenty of free-play area.

How much grooming has to be done to show the Bernese?

Julia: Grooming is very easy. If you do maintenance grooming on a regular basis, the preparation for a dog show can be minimal. Often a bath is in order and to keep in step with the competition, we use a blow dryer to get the coat to look its best. We trim whiskers, although it is not required, neaten the ears and feet a little, and that's about it. We are mindful of not doing anything that would take away from the dog's natural appearance. We feel that sculpting disregards the standard and we hope that judges will not reward those who do it.

Lake Haus Faith of Wyemede.

What advice would you give to breeders just starting out?

Julia: Begin by doing careful research in purchasing the very best possible bitch from an established breeder. Show quality and breeding quality are one and the same. Show your dog. Analyze the kinds of wins you have made. Did your dog win because it really was superior in a field of outstanding dogs or was the ring full of mediocrity with your dog being the best of the mediocre? Be ruthless with yourself by honestly evaluating what you have. Make OFA certification a prerequisite for breeding. Above all, don't breed simply because you made an investment in a dog. Be prepared to start over again. Attend National Specialties whether you show or not.

Elizabeth: Breed seldom, until you see what your dog is producing. The year the bitch really needs off from breeding is a good year to take a look at the puppies you have produced to know whether the dog should be bred again. A male should not be bred too often until what he produces can be evaluated.

Are there any particular kennels that you would name as those you consider to be among the best today?

Julia: My sense of ethics would never permit me to do that. In our years of involvement with the breed, we have come to know a number of breeders whose philosophy in breeding, integrity, success and achievement we hold in the highest regard. Keep in mind that in the index of members of the BMDCA by kennel name there are 233 listed. Best kennels for what, when and why might well be served by any of those for a particular individual's needs.

Would you recommend that someone new to breeding join a local breed club, the national breed club or an all breed club?

Elizabeth: Before contemplating breeding, time should be logged as an owner/exhibitor of dogs. During that time, membership should have included the local or regional breed club and the national breed club. Belonging to a local all-breed club is always very educational, as it broadens one's knowledge in the sport of dogs and provides tremendous insight in the ethics of dog showing and breeding. A new breeder should be a sponge for gaining as much information as possible. Membership in the national club with attendance at the National Specialty being a priority is essential to equipping one's self for responsible breeding.

Would you say that the parent club

is doing enough to educate new members and judges?

Julia: Yes. The national club's publications are an excellent source of education. Programs at National Specialties provide information for new and longtime members. The BMDCA was among the first specialty clubs to host judges' breed study groups. It is a very effective organization.

Is there an AKC video for the breed?

Julia: Yes. There was a video/slide conversion and later on an all video was made. There were good points in both and seeing both of them is very beneficial.

Was there something in particular you liked about the slide show that didn't carry over into the newer video?

Julia: Because the slide show drew upon so many different dogs, examples of faults were shown with an actual dog rather than just explaining a particular fault if no dog was present with that fault. When the slide presentation was made, slides were submitted by members from all over the country as well as slides being taken at the National Specialty. Of course, seeing the dog in motion is fantastic.

Is there adequate literature available today on the breed?

Julia: There is room for more. Devotees of any breed have a voracious appetite for information on their particular breed.

Where were you born?

Julia: We were both born in Washington, DC. We lived in the Virginia area and eventually moved to Florida after a year in Missouri. I graduated from high school while we were in Florida.

Elizabeth: At that time, I was in the sixth grade.

Julia: We moved here in 1956 and maintained a property in Florida for summer enjoyment until 1972.

Why did you move to Maryland?

Julia: I needed to get an education. Our mother was limited in her resources, so she located a teaching position where there was a college in the same location. I prepared for a career in education at Salisbury State College, now Salisbury State University. Later on, I got an MA degree in history from Stetson University in Florida during our summer "vacations." (laughter) In 1994, I retired after 33x years of teaching. In 1989, I received Wicomico County's Outstanding Teacher of the Year for Middle School.

Elizabeth, summarize your life's story for us, please.

Elizabeth: I also chose a teaching career, with my field being science. We both graduated from the same undergraduate school. Later, I earned an MS degree from the College of William and Mary in the teaching of science. I've taught life science and physical science for eighteen years. As far as our work with dogs, I am a support person! (laughter) I'm more the handyman type of person. I'm the one who gets up at five in the morning and feeds the dogs. I do a lot of the manual work while Julie does the mental work. Now that she has retired, she is getting into more and more physical work. To be really successful takes a lot of teamwork. When there are only two on the team, it means we both work really hard. Our attitude about everything is which person will be the best able to do the job at the time. We divide and conquer.

Have you found that specific dogs develop a better rapport with one or the other of you?

Elizabeth: Yes, they definitely do. Sometimes a dog can be so attached to one person that it just can't concentrate on showing and it needs a more strict person dealing with it at that moment. It depends on the temperament of the dog whether it needs one or the other of us.

Do you have any other major interests that are almost as high on your list as dogs?

Elizabeth: Dogs, traveling and school. That's it! (laughter) There is no time for anything else. We have had some marvelous travel experiences in this country and abroad with our wonderful stepmother who has been very generous in making it possible.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

Julia: The most beautiful gift the dogs have given us are the people we have met through them. That is the greatest reward. That they limit our freedom can't be denied, but we manage.

Elizabeth: As to my lifestyle, I would like to sleep in every now and then. (laughter) Sleeping in means sleeping until seven in the morning. I have enjoyed the dogs very much. They give a great deal of friendship and free hugs.

Are there any drawbacks to being in dogs?

Elizabeth: There are heartbreaks and disappointments. Discovering that a promising young dog is dysplastic is devastating. All the love, time and devotion expended are powerless to reverse the situation, but the wonderful, happy dog that has resulted in a fantastic companion. For the breeder there is nothing else to be done except to start again. Spay or neuter the dog and keep it yourself or locate a wonderful pet home. A long list of heartbreaks could easily be generated, but the high points keep us going.

Julia: Our grandfather was a homespun, philosophic kind of person. Having grown up on a farm, he used to say when encountering disappointment, "Pick up your pail and go to the next cow." One has to be ready to start again or give up. My watchwords in confronting adversity or setbacks are those of Admiral Farragut at Mobile Bay in 1864, "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead, full speed!" (laughter) I'm not going to get shot down!

Elizabeth: We may have to change our goals or plans, but we aren't going to give up.

Are there any dog stories that come to mind that you would like to share?

Julia: Siren, the mother of Bruce and daughter of our foundation bitch, was from a litter that we co-bred with Sylvia Howison. We were working so hard to get sound Berners that were OFA certified that we decided to name all the puppies with names of sounds. There was Siren, Cymbal, Thunder and so on. Siren was OFA #25. We were living in town then and had a huge yard fenced for the dogs which consisted of a Labrador, a Borzoi, a Collie and four Bernese. One morning they were outside running and playing their favorite game of "keep away." It was soon evident that Siren had some prize that the others were after. When it came time to get ready for school, we called them in. With the usual charge of energy they dashed to their various places to be secured for the day, but Siren hung back and didn't come inside. She waited to make sure the others were in and put away before she would come past the door. She entered the house and opened her mouth to drop on the floor a very wet, but live, baby bird. We then realized that she had rescued the fledgling and kept it from all the dogs despite their hot pursuit. We dried the little thing off and put it back outside where relieved parents hustled it away. Siren epitomized Berner gentleness.

Is there anything else we haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

Elizabeth: Maybe to just reiterate how important it is that people work together for the betterment of the breed. People should consider that the friendships and feelings of human beings are more important than anything else.

Julia: Through man's best friend, we make best friends with our fellow man. The human qualities of respect and caring for other people are essential for productivity. Integrity and ethics are of paramount importance in conducting ourselves as fanciers. The highlight of a lifetime in dogs was when I was presented with the BMDCA's Outstanding Service Award with life membership at the 1993 Specialty in Kansas City. Not far from there, 47 years earlier, my first interest in Bernese was stirred.

Thank you both so much for talking to us for The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual.

Elizabeth: Thank you! •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Christina Ohlsen
BERNERLIEBE
Rye, Colorado

This interview was conducted at the home of Christina Ohlsen in April 1995 by Jane Bleakley.

How long have you been breeding Bernese Mountain Dogs?

Since 1975. I got my first Bernese Mountain Dog in 1973 – a big, neutered male. He sold us on the breed, and we got a little female the following year. That started it all.

How did you acquire your male?

I grew up in Sweden and had known of the breed there. Years later, my family and I had a Husky. One day the Husky ran away and we looked for her in a nearby park where a big dog show was going on. There, I met a man named Jim Brooks from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, who had a Bernese Mountain Dog with him. At the time I didn't know what they were called in this country. The Swiss way of saying their name is Berner Sennen Hund. I asked him where he lived and said, "I've always loved these dogs." I followed that up with a letter, and he called me to say he had some pet-quality Bernese Mountain Dogs for sale if I was interested. That's how I got my very first one.

Were you in Colorado at the time?

No, we were in Salt Lake City, Utah. We moved here seventeen years ago.

What made you decide to go ahead and show and breed your dogs?

Actually, I was only interested in showing in obedience. I like the teamwork involved in obedience training. When we got our second dog, Daphne (again from Jim Brooks in Wyoming), she turned out to be so nicely put together that I was encouraged to show her in conformation as well as obedience. From her first litter, we produced a dog that a lot of "Bernese people" have heard about, Ch. Ashley v. Bernerliebe CD. With Ashley came the responsibility of showing seriously in conformation. He was a good representative of the breed, and, whether I liked it or not, he needed to be seen out in the "canine world." He was mostly shown by my friend Denise Dean from Williams, Arizona. That arrangement started a very good friendship that is still going strong. She was already a professional handler at the time; she's also a groomer and shows her Old English Sheepdogs. When she met Ashley, she had just recently acquired her first Bernese Mountain Dog. She saw Ashley in Albuquerque at a show and offered to help show him.

Ashley was born in a litter of four, one girl and two other boys. They all had problems, but in those days I didn't understand what real problems were. I thought the puppies were well-marked and that was fine, but there is a little more to it than that. (laughter) “You can’t just paint the house; you have to build it well first.” That comes from Sylvia Howison, who is a long-term charter member of the National Breed Club. Ashley had the best markings of the litter, but he had an overbite. At the time, we were getting ready to move to Colorado and I was not going to keep a puppy, so he was sold to my veterinarian. The vet kept Ashley for about two weeks, then called and said, “You know, I’ve decided I just can’t pay $200 for a dog I am going to neuter.” I said, “Fine, I’ll come and get him.” So I brought him home again. We moved here to Colorado and nothing was done about getting him a new home, because we now had plenty of room for three dogs.

The big guy, Ch. Ashley v Bernerliebe CD, handled this day by good friend Denise Dean.

Ch. Broken Oaks Jarrow v Bernerliebe CD.

When Ashley was about fourteen months old, he was out playing in the snow, and I said to myself, “He is gorgeous!” I looked him over, opened his mouth, and discovered he now had a perfect scissors bite. I ran into a friend, Joan Anselm, who later helped me show Ashley and who is now a judge for our breed. I asked her, “What do you call this bite?” She said, “That’s a scissors bite.” I said, “Okay! Let’s show him.” He went to his first show in Pueblo, Colorado, with Joan showing him. He won the Breed over his mother, Daphne. There were only the two Bernese Mountain Dogs at the show. He went on to the Group, and under Mrs. Gunterman, from Oklahoma I believe, he got a Group second. That was quite a start. The following year he ended up winning the specialty in Santa Rosa, California. On the way home, I stopped at the veterinarian’s in Salt Lake City and said, “I owe you one. I’m glad this dog isn’t neutered!” (laughter)

Is Ashley the best dog that you have ever owned or bred?

Yes, I am sure of that. There is a problem with that, starting out with the best. It can be very discouraging when you try to duplicate it. It is very hard to do. I have never had another dog as impressive as Ashley.

How many dogs do you keep here now?

Five.

What’s the largest number of dogs you have ever kept?

Probably nine of my own, plus a few that were here to be bred. I have never had more that twelve on the place. Bernese Mountain Dogs are not good kennel dogs; they have to be family dogs, as far as I am concerned. If you get too many, somebody will be neglected and unhappy. I like to be able to have them all in the house at once. A large number of dogs just doesn't work well with our family because of our lifestyle. When I had twelve dogs, that was too many, but in those days we also had sheep and I spent most of my time outdoors, so they all got plenty of attention.

When you had litters, were they named with any sort of scheme?

Yes, the litters were named alphabetically. Ashley's litter was "A." At first, he was affectionately known as "Cuddles." When we decided to keep him, we had to come up with a name good enough to register him with. We went to a friend and said, "We need some great lover's name starting with an A." She thought of *Gone with the Wind* and Ashley.

Do you feel you have established a distinguishable line with Ashley and the dogs you have now?

Yes, but not through my own efforts so much as with the help of Denise Dean. She has done most of the breeding, work and research. We discuss everything and feel similarly about what we like to see in the dogs, but she has done all the work, really. I have raised some litters, but I have not been as serious and dedicated as she is.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

It means "love of Berners" or "Bernerlove" – I'm surprised nobody else thought of it first.

Will you talk a little about inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing and when each should be done?

There are a great many discussions on this subject. To always outcross means that you don't know what "ingredients" you have, so you might get some real surprises when you breed. To linebreed using individuals about whom you know a lot will make you better able to predict what your results will be. Inbreeding occasionally has a place in a breeding program, but only with an experienced breeder who stays responsible for the results. Inbreeding can produce outstanding results, but it can also produce disasters. Linebreeding on an outstanding individual, with an occasional outcross, has given me the best results.

Do you have an opinion on which is more important as far as type, temperament and soundness?

In my book, temperament is absolutely number one. First of all, you have to live with the dog. You do want a sound dog; an unsound dog may be in pain, which can affect temperament. Temperament and soundness go hand in hand. Type is also important. You don't want to lose what's attractive in the breed. If a dog has soundness of body and temperament, it can usually pull a cart, which is what the breed was designed to do. If they have slightly too-long legs (which my youngest dog does now), it's not ideal, but it is not causing him any pain. To me, the issues of type are a little less important than temperament and soundness. I think it's best to start with soundness and try to bring back proper type from there. Many people are very hung-up on mark-

Ch. Deer Park Di Di v Bernerliebe CD.

Ch. Bernerliebe's Hide A Zeke CDX, DD, CGC, HIC, TT, shown at ten weeks.

ings. Obviously, the markings should be within reason, but the dog doesn't pull the cart with its markings. To me, the temperament and soundness are more important than the markings.

Will you describe your interpretation of the perfect dog of this breed?

That is hard to do, but Ashley came pretty close to my ideal. He was a good-sized dog (105 pounds), nicely proportioned. He loved the world, and he never showed signs of stress even though he often found himself in strange circumstances. (He once rode the subway to Madison Square Garden to get to the show during a storm.) He was sound enough to be exercised by running alongside us when we rode horseback, but calm enough to relax when nobody could take time out for a walk. He lived with all sorts of farm animals without hurting anything. As he got older he became more sensitive to noise; thunder and fireworks bothered him, but he still accepted traveling by air without any problems. He loved all people, but knew to stay with his family on camping trips and other adventures.

Describe how a dog should move, from the front and from the side.

There should be an easy movement, where you feel the dog could go on jogging (in front of a cart) for a long time. There should be balance between front and rear, without extreme reach or drive at either end. A Bernese Mountain Dog doesn't need to fly like a setter, but it's okay if he does as long as he can also move at a slower pace.

What are the most serious faults that you see in the breed today?

Probably a lack of soundness. If a dog is not put together correctly, it can't move well. Some dogs are off-balance, with a good front end but a poorly-matched rear. Or they might have a good, strong rear and a weak front. A well-balanced, sound dog is my ideal.

Are there any significant health problems in the breed today?

There are a lot of health problems in the breed, and we are all working hard on trying to trace them. How do they come up? Where does it happen? Where is it coming from? It is, by far, the main emphasis of most breeders today. We have a breed-specific type of cancer. We don't have the answers yet, but everybody is supporting the study quite well. I did not keep as good records on my early dogs as I should have, so it has been tough for me to bring out any statistics related to cancer and other health problems in my early litters, and I feel badly about that.

Are there any other health problems?

Various cancers and auto-immune problems cause the greatest heartaches. There is dysplasia of hips and elbows, too, but fortunately in most cases it is mild enough to still make for a happy pet.

What are ideal heights of dogs and bitches?

The standard has quite a variable and the ideal is somewhere in the middle. Again, it goes back to balance. If a dog is big but well-balanced and athletic, then it doesn't bother me that he is big. If you have a tall dog that is not sound, of course, the height accentuates the problem of unsoundness.

Is there any size limitation for the bitch?

Dooper and Derrick (runt) at four weeks. D-litter. The runt, Derrick, became Ch. Derrick v Bernerliebe and has produced two litters.

Yes, but I don't think that's as important as the dog's basic balance. My little tiny bitch here has produced my two giants. When breeding, instead of looking only at what we have in front of us, maybe we need to look at the pedigree to see what we have behind each individual and what we can expect to get out of the breeding. The balanced look is more important than the actual size.

Ch. Ashley v Bernerliebe CD.

Would popularization help or harm the breed at this point?

It worries me a little bit. It's more likely to hurt the breed. I am basing that on what has happened in other breeds. It may also help a breed. The Doberman became popular, for example, and breeders have come a long way in improving that breed in temperament. As long as responsibility comes along with popularization, it can help a breed. The more individuals we have, the broader our chances to improve the dog, but the growing popularity can be a little bit scary. One safeguard is that it is not easy to breed Bernese Mountain Dogs: you don't always get a good-sized litter, or any puppies at all after a breeding, so those people who want to do it strictly for commercial reasons get discouraged quickly. You really have to love the dogs to stick with them.

Is judging fair?

Yes. Obviously all judging is subjective. We all interpret the standard in our own way to some degree. It's very noticeable when a judge is fond of the breed. They look a little harder at the dogs. Judges who don't know the breed as well may be more inclined to look at markings rather than at the whole dog. There have been a couple of times when a judge has questioned the coat on a puppy when its coat was much curlier than what the standard specifies, but the more experienced judges know that that is usually a puppy syndrome. This type of thing shows lack of education in the judge.

Would you rather show under an all breed judge or a breeder-judge?

I've been happy with both. It's kind of fun, especially under the old-time breed judges, to see how they feel you have progressed or if you have been stagnant as a breeder. That can be more exciting, because you are familiar with the judge, but I have been happy both ways.

Do you show your own dogs?

I do, but I am not as good at it as some are. I am so fortunate that Denise helped me so much over the years. She is a really good showman and all the dogs absolutely adore her. Some of my dogs get concerned about me when I show them, because I get nervous. When Denise takes the lead, they seem to say, "Whew! Now someone else is in charge and I don't have to worry any more." Some of my dogs are insecure with me, but when Denise takes them into the ring, it's like they are off the hook and they can relax.

Do you think they sense her capability?

Oh, absolutely. There is no doubt about it. On the other hand, I feel much better showing in obedience, which Denise does not really enjoy. I do not totally enjoy showing in conformation, because I feel like I can really hurt the dog's chances their.

Do you train your own puppies, and at what age do you start?

I think you train them right from the start. My dogs are not taken to classes until later, but by being part of the family, they develop a vocabulary. Jarrow here was never formally trained, and he got his CD just because he and I communicated without having specific training. We don't get high scores that way, but he loves me a lot and when I say something, he gets it somewhere near right.

How intelligent is the Bernese Mountain Dog compared with other breeds?

That's a question you should ask my husband. You would get a different answer. They are very eager to please. They love their people a lot. It seems to me the females might be a little brighter in coming up with their own things to do, whereas the males are a little more laid-back. There are exceptions to that, too. Sometimes I wonder if they aren't smarter than what we give them credit for and that's why they get into trouble. There are probably brighter breeds around.

Can a shy or aggressive dog be corrected with training?

To some degree, but those tendencies are genetic, too. I've seen them in my own breeding when I have come up with combinations that were not as good as most. There seems to be a particular age at which shyness develops. The dog may not have been shy as a puppy, but it begins to act that way when the hormones set in. You can generally teach shy dogs to behave better by telling them what to do and letting them know that someone else is in charge. A shy dog is also a dog that might become aggressive out of fear. There are also shy, reserved dogs that would never hurt a flea, but shyness is not a good thing in our breed.

Have you been involved in weight-pulling with your dogs?

Not weight-pulling, but draft work. For years, my dogs pulled the kids in sleds and I'd go to preschools and stuff like that, but I never did any of it officially until I worked with my dog Jarrow. Unfortunately, when we were trying to pass his Novice Draft Dog Test, he got sick and was unable to complete the test. He did the first part, but I asked to be excused for the second part. He was sick for several months after that, and I have not pursued it further, because now he is too old. I am now in the process of getting Di Di, one of my females, to that same point. It is something I really enjoy doing.

What is involved in the Novice Draft Test?

It is an obstacle course done on leash while the dog is harnessed to a cart; that part is followed by a long-distance pull.

You feel, then, that the breed should do what it was bred for?

Oh, absolutely. When I look at a dog in the ring, I ask myself, "Could that dog pull a cart or not?" Sometimes we get dogs that are very flashy and exaggerated in gait, but if they can't do the shorter stride, obviously they couldn't pull a cart.

Would you elaborate on the therapy work you are doing?

That is probably what my dogs and I do best right now. That's our main interest. It sort of justifies my having all these big "beasts" around. I do the pet therapy every week as long as I am in town. I rotate my five dogs so that they take turns. Di Di, poor dear, is so popular that she pretty much goes every week. She's my "star," although Jarrow used to be the star; he earned the right to represent our hospital as the "volunteer of the year" at a big banquet a few years ago. There were about 350 people there from various Pueblo businesses, and Jarrow got many little scraps of roast beef for dinner. (laughter) He was very popular, but as he has grown older I haven't been taking him as often. He still gets very excited when he gets to go, and he's very popular with the patients.

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Ch. Ashley v Bernerliebe CD, shown with the tank holding his "frozen progeny."

The mere presence of the dogs inside the hospital brings out smiles on the faces of both patients and staff. The dogs wear a special blanket and a photo-ID telling who they are and what they're doing there. On the rehab and extended care floors we (the humans) talk to people while they pet the dogs. (I usually bring a team of two dogs to the hospital from 3 to 5 pm for an after-school program for kids with behavior problems.) The patients will tell about their own pets, etc. It gets them to open up and talk. Stroke patients are encouraged to use their hands to reach out and pet the dogs. Di Di will stand up on the side of the beds so people can reach her better if they want to. We have had families burst into tears when a non-responsive patient suddenly reaches out for the dog. We recently saw a little lady hooked up to every kind of tube, totally unable to move any part of her body but her eyes. When Di Di entered her room those eyes would light up and her eyebrows would play up and down. It is an incredible experience to see a reaction in someone who supposedly is unable to react in the slightest. The dogs also help to calm people down on the psych floors. And when the kids meet these gentle giants on the pediatric floor, you can truly see how dogs are "man's best friend." The littlest people can easily walk my dogs up and down the hall. One little boy who came to the hospital with a horrible history of neglect and who was just learning about the world said, "Look nurse, my horsey!"

What else have you done besides raise and breed your dogs?

I came to this country as an au pair (nanny) working in a family and ended up staying here. I started school over a couple of times and have three years of college. I have been very fortunate in having a husband who supports me while I have my fun. I've raised sheep and I'm into weaving now. I guess my career is volunteering. (laughter)

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

It has been a very nice outlet for me, being married to a doctor who seems to work around the clock. It is nice to have my own separate interest. It certainly has been very beneficial to my children. (They may argue with me on this!) They have each raised a dog for a 4-H project. Actually, my son had some bad luck, so he ended up with several different dogs. His dogs kept being afflicted with cancer and he got pretty discouraged. Both children did extremely well with their dog projects and earned trips to Washington D.C. and New York where they developed several friendships. It's been a very good, positive influence.

What are the drawbacks of being in dogs?

I don't know if there are any. To me, there aren't any drawbacks. There are a lot of positives. The fact that you have to arrange for someone to take care of the dogs when you go away may be a drawback. There are always kids around to do that, however. I can't think of a negative. You don't get into dogs to make money. If you think you are going to get into Bernese Mountain Dogs to raise money, you are fooling yourself. As much as we love them, this breed has enough problems to make that impossible. I usually tell puppy buyers that this is an investment that is not going to pay them back financially. I know some breeders who ask questions such as "do you own your own home?" and, "Do you have a sound financial background?" before they will let people have a puppy, because things can go wrong and they can be very costly.

Are your breedings natural or controlled, and how do you help the mating along?

I do assist my males in mating by holding the bitch and guiding the male. I train all my males to accept my assistance to avoid injury in case a bitch panics.

Should a stud fee be the same for proven and unproven dogs?

No, not necessarily. A stud fee is usually worth one average puppy, and a puppy from unproven parents is worth less than one from proven parents. This, of course, is something to be decided between the owners of the stud and bitch.

What faults might keep you from breeding a dog?

Poor temperament. That fault will get back to you later. I have compromised in the past, using dogs with uncertified hips and elbows, for example, but only when I felt the dog was an outstanding individual in other respects. I would not compromise today by using a dog with affected hips if his or her parents were also affected. I believe we have enough good dogs today to avoid compromises we may regret later. It was a different story 20 years ago when I began.

How many breedings have you done?

I'm really not sure. I have raised enough litters to go through the alphabet once, and then a few more. Ashley was bred to about 20 bitches.

How many litters should a bitch have?

It makes sense to me to go on with some of the good sons and daughters

Ch. Dulf Daphne v Yodlerhof CD with Ch. Quintus v Bernerliebe as a four-week-old puppy. Daphne was almost twelve when this picture was taken and died shortly thereafter.

after two or three litters, rather than repeating the original breeding several times. But there are exceptions. I like to spay my bitches at six years of age for health reasons. I call it preventive medicine. The reproductive system seems to develop problems before anything else does.

What is the oldest and youngest a bitch should be bred?

Not before eighteen months usually, so you can have an idea of what she is going to be like. Always check x-rays first; if they are at all questionable, I would wait until age two and get an official OFA reading. I don't breed bitches after age six.

What do you do to help your bitches whelp?

Exercise and careful monitoring of her diet are important. I take her temperature when it gets closer to whelping time. If her temperature drops but I don't see signs of labor, I check with my vet. I have had to resort to cesarean sections a number of times for various reasons.

Have you ever used a tube or bottle-fed puppies?

Yes. It is a chore that, fortunately, I have only had to do a few times for a short period. I trained for this on our sheep – or was it the other way around?

Do you wean puppies yourself or let the bitch do it?

I gradually introduce puppy food at about three weeks of age. The bitch is usually putting them on a schedule by then, rather than staying with them constantly. By six weeks of age my puppies are totally on puppy food.

At what age should puppies be placed in their new homes?

If people come here to pick them up, sometimes I let them go at seven weeks, especially if they are people who are interested in obedience. It seems as if there have been lots of studies saying 49 days is the ideal time to get a dog that you want to use in obedience, because they bond best at that age. If I am shipping a puppy, it usually goes between eight and ten weeks.

Do you take your puppies back if there is a problem?

Oh, yes. In fact, there doesn't have to be a specified reason. I take my dogs back because I don't want them to go elsewhere without my knowing it. That is very clearly stated in my contract.

Do you sell your pet puppies with a spay or neuter agreement?

Yes. I ask people to please take care of that. Sometimes I will say, "Let's look at the dog in six to twelve months," and wee make the decision later. Of course, if the hips aren't good I ask people to spay or neuter.

Other than carting, how do you condition your dogs?

Living on a ranch, we go for walks every day, and they go with me sometimes when I ride horses, so they are pretty active.

What do you feed your dogs and how important is diet in raising a Bernese?

My dogs get a dry kibble of about 22 percent protein, to which I add a little water and a spoonful of canned food. Jarrow, as an old dog, eats a special diet with less protein. In the winter I raise the percentage of fat in their food a little.

Do you feed any supplements?

No, not as a rule. Right now I have two dogs who receive thyroid supplements in their diet. They were both seven years old before they seemed to need this.

When showing the dogs, how much grooming needs to be done?

Our breed is supposed to be shown naturally. I bathe them a day ahead of time and blow-dry their coats to fluff them up. I tidy them up by trimming the hair on their feet and whiskers. I don't "scissor down" and reshape the dogs much, except a little around the neck and belly.

What advice might you give to people who are just starting out breeding?

I usually recommend owning one or two for a while before you even think about breeding. There are enough things to learn, and enough problems, that I don't think anyone should take on a breeding project until they have learned about the breed for a while. I am always happy to help anyone. I've recently met a family that really wanted a puppy and they don't want to do any breeding, but they are perfectly happy to let me be part-owner so that we can make decisions together about breeding.

Would you recommend joining a local breed club, the national club or an all-breed club?

Yes, all three.

Is the parent club doing enough to educate new owners and judges?

There are judges' seminars at the specialties, and those have been very popular. There have been very nice things said about them. People really appreciate the opportunity to come and learn. We are getting more and more regional supported entries, etc. The national club is so large that it can't really educate the individual owner. Anymore, that should be the responsibility of the regional clubs. The national club has gotten too big to handle everything.

Is there an AKC video on the breed?

Yes.

Do you feel it is a good one?

Yes, I think it is reasonable. I haven't seen too many other breed videos. It started out being just a slide show. I have only seen the new video once. They did a nice job, even though they had some horrible weather when they were trying to do some of it. The people looked a little cold. (laughter)

Is there adequate literature available for the breed?

It is getting better. There used to be nothing available, but as the breed becomes more popular there are more requests for literature, so more is being written and made available.

Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to discuss?

These dogs are so sharing and loving. I've had people who have had puppies, have lost them at age two and have come right back to get another one. that says an awful lot. The owners get quality time with the dogs, even if they don't get quantity time and longevity. Nothing beats that. Another thing people are amazed about is how we can have all these male dogs together with no problems. They are very laid-back and so anxious to please that they almost always get along with each other. We used to joke about how the Berner people were like their dogs and seem to get along just as well – although there have been a few exceptions I've heard about lately, I'm sorry to say. My experience in this breed is that the people tend to be an awful lot like their dogs and tend to get along well. We had a Berner retreat here a couple of years ago, and here were all these dogs running loose, and they were getting along just fine. I've heard the same thing said about the Berner fest they have in Arizona every year. The dogs are laid-back and secure – maybe they don't have egos they feel they have to defend.

Do you think size has anything to do with that feeling?

No, I really don't. The biggest one I have (Link) is the wimpiest one in the bunch. When my father visits us from Sweden, he keeps saying, "Link, why don't you look in the mirror?" (laughter)

Last year, I had left Link with some handlers, because I was doing several fun projects with the other dogs and he was only entered in conformation. He got lost; he wandered out of the motel room in the middle of the night without anybody noticing. Somebody walked out to check on something and the 125 pounds of puppy dog slipped out the door. He was gone for five days, and even though the show was sponsored by a very small group, they got on the stick and made posters and helped with everything to find our "missing Link." I suddenly discovered how many friends I had in the "doggy world." You can go anywhere in the country, or even in Europe, and call someone up and say, "I'm a Bernese Mountain Dog person." I've had people come here and do that. It's an instant passport.

As a matter of fact, years ago, after we had lived in Colorado for a couple of years, I got a phone call. Another couple here in Rye, who also happen to be Swedish, called and said they had picked up a young man hitchhiking on the interstate who said he was on his way to visit me. They asked if I knew the young man and I said I didn't, but I told them to send him along. He was Swedish and his name was Hans. He had a Bernese Mountain Dog in Sweden. I had just written an article about Ashley for the Swedish club and said in it, "If anybody happens to come by my way, stop in and say 'Hi.' " I said it sort of as a joke: How many Swedish people are going to come to Colorado? Hans' mother had seen the article and put the newsletter in his backpack, so when he came to Colorado he could look me up. He stayed with us for a while, took a tour out west and then came back and visited us again – all because of the dogs. You make all kinds of contacts.

Thank you. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Deborah Mulvey
GRUNBERG
Waterbury Center, Vermont

This interview was conducted at the home of Deborah Mulvey in February 1995 by Barbara Kinsella.

How long have you been in the breed?

I showed my first one in about 1971. I was showing her for her owners. I probably got my first one in 1974 or 1975.

Did you show other breeds, as well?

Yes. I raised Rottweilers for about ten years before my Bernese. My first dog was actually a Smooth Fox Terrier.

What made you change from Terriers to Rottweilers and then to Bernese Mountain Dogs?

I got the Fox Terrier as a result of answering a column in *Popular Dogs* magazine when I was a kid. My mother was actually buying magazines from a door-to-door salesman. My brother was getting *Popular Mechanics* and I wanted a horse magazine. That wasn't going to fly, and the only thing next to it was *Popular Dogs*. I didn't even know it was a trade magazine. As I read the magazines I began corresponding with the Junior Canins and got the Fox Terrier as a result of that. We lived in Connecticut, were planning a move to Vermont and we needed a dog that would protect us in the country. That's how we switched to Rottweilers. Rottweilers were tough dogs and you got to a point where you spent a lot of time explaining why your dog was unapproachable. I was showing the Rottweilers one day at a dog show and there were two Bernese Mountain Dogs at that show. It was unheard of for there to be two together. They gaited for the judge, and when they got to the judge, they lapped the judge's face. I said, "That's it. That's what I want." We've been with them ever since.

So, you fell in love with the personality?

Absolutely.

When you started, then, there weren't many Bernese Mountain Dogs around?

No. You had to look hard and far to find them. When we first started showing them, we had to correspond with other owners to get dogs together to have a dog show.

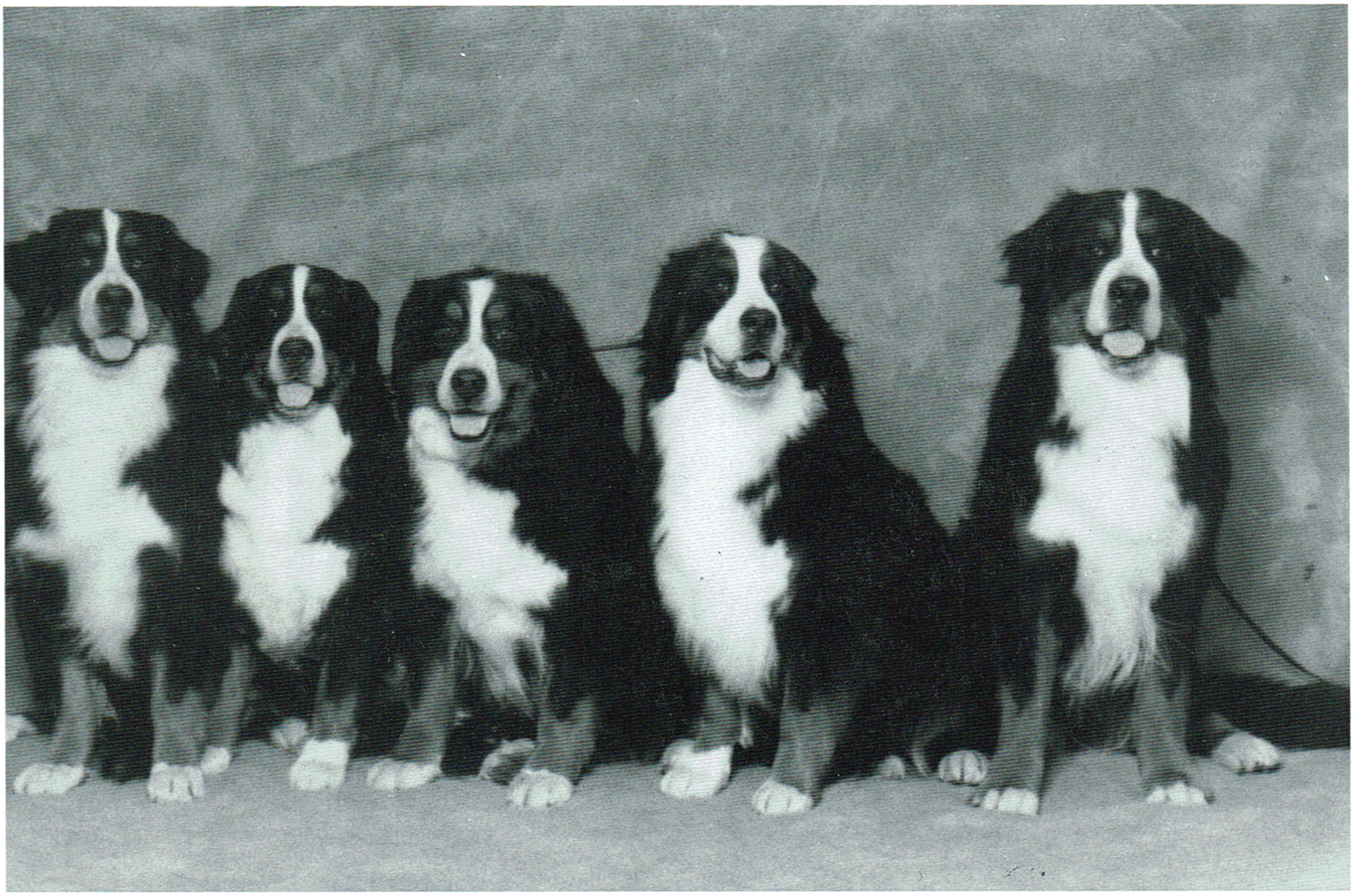
Who was your first Bernese?

The first one I actually showed was a dog from Fairfax, Vermont, owned by Carol Lavell, who is famous in dressage and a bronze medal winner at the Olympics in dressage. They had a litter of Bernese, which was unheard of in Vermont, and I decided I wanted to go see them. I left my checkbook home and went to see the puppies. I fell in love with one and said if I was going to buy one, that was the one I would buy, and walked away. Six months later, they came to a dog show with three or four of the dogs on horse leads, and that beautiful bitch was among them. I said, "Will you sell her?" They said, "Oh, no. This is the puppy you liked." I said, "If you won't sell her, will you let me show her?" I showed her and she was undefeated to her title at a time when we had to go all over the eastern seaboard to find competition. The dog's name was Ch. Tails and Hocks Bright Spray, and it was about 1971 when she was shown.

I was eventually going to have one of her puppies. She had a litter of one and I couldn't take their only puppy. They were going to keep it. I showed him, too. His name was Fidoberg. He became the number two Bernese in Canada the first year they were able to be shown there. He was Reserve Winners at our second National Specialty in Fresno, California in 1977. In the meantime, Spray was killed by a snow plow, so I went looking for a puppy of my own and found one in New Jersey named Black Mountains Dina. Dina did not live a long life. She died when she was sixteen months old with cancer. Back then, we didn't think anything of it. We were without a dog for a couple of months. Another puppy became available and we got the puppy. That was Tugger, who turned out to be a very shy Bernese, so we never showed him.

The next thing we did was to go up into Canada. This was when they were just registering the breed there. We found a Swiss farmer who had a litter of puppies from a very good pedigree. The people spoke no English and we used hand signals to make them understand what we wanted. We decided to take two of the puppies, but then we had to get them across the border. They had to have shots and we couldn't find out whether they had had shots or not. We finally got through to him, so he was able to rouse his vet in the middle of the night. Indeed, they'd had their shots, but then we had to deal with paying for them as we came across the border for any duty that was due. There is no duty on a purebred dog if it is brought into this country for breeding purposes, but we didn't have any papers proving they were purebred dogs because all the papers were in Toronto. We did a lot of talking as we came across the border. Those two bitches Tori and Hope were the foundation of our Bernese breeding. We ended up with Tails and Hocks Tasha of Black Mountain. She went on to become Winners Bitch and Best of Opposite at the National Specialty, and she produced a Group placing puppy.

In the meantime, I was enamored



Left to right: Uhlein, Ulricka, Brie (mom), Ura and Uri.

with a bitch in Pittsburgh. It was a Swiss bitch owned by Mary Dawson, one of the early breeders in this country. She was Zyta v. Nesselacker who won our first National Specialty. Zyta was a gorgeous bitch. She was bred to a dog in Wisconsin named John Henry and produced a very lovely litter – one of which was then bred to a dog named Wymede's Luron Bruce. That produced a litter of ten or twelve puppies and from that litter came several champions. One of them was Ch. Shepherd's Patch Carl B, that we called "Ben." Ben ended up as my foundation sire. He was Winners Dog and Best of Winners at the 1980 National Specialty, and went on to become a top producer for the breed. There was another specialty winner in that litter. Actually, there were two more because two years later I went back and bought his sister. She went on to go Reserve at the National. His sister was Shepherd's Patch Chemarian. We called her "Ruffian." Those were the early dogs.

How many champions have you had over the years?

I don't know. Not a lot. I've prob-

BEST OF
WINNERS
GREEN MOUNTAIN
DOG CLUB
JULY
1989

Grunberg Uri, 1989.

Am/Can Ch. Shepherds Patch Carl B, "Ben," 1979.

GRUNBERG
KENNEL

Grunberg Butternut Fudge, "Brie," 1990.

ably had fifteen dogs. I don't do a lot of showing. I probably go to ten or twelve shows a year, and I don't put a lot of my dogs into show homes. Some people think I am too choosy.

Did you show them or use a handler?

I showed them myself up until two years ago when I decided to use a handler for the first time. I like using a handler, too.

How many litters have you had over the years?

I've completed the alphabet, but that's cheating because the first four litters were Rottweiler litters. When I got to Z, I named the puppy I kept Zyta in honor of the first Bernese that I fell in love with. Zyta went on to become a champion, as well.

Did you have a best litter?

I liked the U litter, but going back before that, I imported a bitch from Switzerland, an Asso v. Hogerburr daughter, Asta v. Gitzirain. "Assy" and Ben were bred together four times and produced some of the dogs that were

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Above: Ch. Grunberg Ura, daughter of Brie, dam of Zyta.
Facing page: Ch. Grunberg Zyta, daughter of Ura.

ASHBES

Uri babysitting Benna.

foundation stock for other people. Those were very nice dogs.

Can you name a few of those dogs?

There was Iridescent Fire and Fabiana. The U litter that came down from them, and was a twelve-puppy litter, was probably one of the nicest litters we've had.

How many dogs do you have now?

I have five dogs here at the house and a couple of others out on co-ownerships.

Are they mostly house dogs?

Yes. The Bernese love to be with you as a part of the family, so they do better in home situations.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

When we started breeding Rottweilers, we wanted a real German sounding name. We were moving to Vermont and Vermont's state name is the green mountain state. Grunberg is German for green mountain. We put it on the puppies and say that they take a little bit of Vermont home with them.

Are your dogs recognizable in the ring as being of your breeding?

I think so. People will tell me they have seen a dog and knew it was one of mine. The nicest thing I heard the other day was a from a friend who had been in England and bought some of the English periodicals. A few years back I sent a dog to England. She was reading the yearbooks and came across a dog. She said, "It was the only dog I really liked." When she read the caption, she found out it came down from one of my dogs. I thought that was some indication the type is staying with the dogs.

Are there many Bernese imported as breeding stock from Switzerland?

We have a rather tight gene pool in this country. We still import from Switzerland. Unfortunately, Switzerland has a tight gene pool, too, so we are all relatively closely related. There are some breeders in this country that have also developed their own type and are recognizable, as well.

What is the most important thing about the Bernese?

You have to live with a dog, so if you don't have temperament, you don't have anything. Temperament is very important. Coupled with that is soundness. You have to have a dog that is physically sound.

Do you have a long-range goal in breeding?

I will probably breed enough to keep dogs for my own use. I have never been a big-time breeder. I've only bred one or two litters a year. My burning desire would be to have a pedigree that had nothing but Grunberg on it, but that is probably an impossibility.

What is the ideal Bernese Mountain Dog temperament?

The Bernese Mountain Dog should be self-confident and able to withstand work. They should not be shy, and in the show ring, they should be able to stand for examination and not back away from the judge. They should be friendly, outgoing, laid-back. They tend to have an "Oh, well" attitude about life. They are very good with children. They are very adaptable to changing situations. Dogs that have never been around children act as if they always have been around children. If you are around other dogs, the Bernese will fit in. Our New England regional club has a winter dog walk, usually in February, and they will have 40 or 50 Bernese show up. They go through this state park in the winter and all the dogs are off-lead, just running and playing and having a good time together. That's part of their temperament, too. They just get along, and they seem to get along with everyone.

Berndach Erik v. Grunberg, "Rik," 1991.

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Grunberg Zyta (Ch. Nobo de Braye x Ch. Grunberg Ura), WB and BOS under judge Miguel Angel Martinez.

What were they originally used for?

They were originally farmers' dogs, and the emphasis is on farmers, not farm, so they were with people. They were dual purpose dogs used to drive cattle into summer pastures, so they were used for droving work. Once they were there, they would bring the milk down to market, so they were a draft dog, as well. They are still being used that way in Switzerland. It hasn't died out. In the past four or five years in this country, we have encouraged the draft ability of the dogs and are now having draft tests sponsored and we give draft titles to dogs that complete the work.

Have there been any temperament problems in the breed over the years?

Probably the temperament that we most see that we don't like is the shy dog. Although we don't see it as often as we used to, there is still the dog that won't allow itself to be examined. There has very seldom been a problem with an aggressive dog.

What about conformation?

The Bernese Mountain Dog is supposed to be a large, sturdy dog. He should have sturdy bone. He is a dog that is slightly longer than he is tall. He should have a nice head with good breadth between the ears. They are a hardy, sturdy dog. There are people breeding them without understanding the standard. When you start breeding dogs, you choose a breed because you love it. You go in thinking, "This is what I want," and then you start changing it. If you go in for what the Bernese was bred for, a large, sturdy dog, you don't want to see a dog with slight bone. If we were thinking in terms of horses, and you look at them in terms of draft versus race horse, the Bernese should more closely resemble the build of a stocky draft horse rather than a quick, agile race horse.

What about coat?

The coat is medium length and should not be soft, but have a slightly harsh quality to it. It is jet black in color. Bernese Mountain Dogs shed, we call it Berner fur. We incorporate it in our recipes. (laughter)

What kind of markings do they have?

The markings are very striking. We are a marking breed. Without the markings, they would be just a black dog. It's a tricolored dog and should have a rich, russet brown to their markings and white, clear chest markings. The facial markings vary as far as the amount of white. One of the problems we have in showing judges what we want is because of the variety in facial markings. The standard says the white cannot go beyond a certain point, but there are variations within that. Sometimes a dog with lesser markings is a better specimen than a dog with more markings. It's really a matter of degree with the variations.

Grunberg "C" litter, "the boys."

Ch. Shepherd's Patch Carl B, "Ben."

Grunberg Black Mt Tessa .

The standard requires the dog have a white blaze and that it goes up between the eyes, but that it does not go over into the eye. They should have a brown spot above each eye. The white blaze comes down into a white muzzle band. We prefer symmetry, but don't always get it. The white cannot go back beyond the corner of the mouth. They have a white chest with brown spots on the chest beside the white. They have rust markings on their legs and white paws. The white on the feet should not go above the knuckle. They must have a white tail tip.

What is the disqualification on markings?

There is no disqualification for markings. The only disqualifications in Bernese are blue eyes or any ground color other than black.

Is the bite specified in the standard?

It calls for a scissors bite. Missing teeth is a fault. An undershot or overshot bite is a severe fault. We have some bite problems in the breed. Every once in a while you will find a dog with a missing tooth, but that is not generally a big issue.

What is the correct Bernese gait?

It should have a powerful, smooth, slow trot. As they increase speed, they start to converge towards a centerline. The front should be a square front with no elbowing in or out. From the rear, you should see a little daylight between the legs. They should not be moving close, but they should not be moving wide, either.

How about tailset and topline?

They have a level topline with a slightly sloping croup with a well- set-on tail. They can carry their tails up when alert, but the tail should never curl over the back.

What is the ideal height and weight of the Bernese?

Our standard does not have any height disqualification. The bitches are 23 to 25 inches and the males 25 to 27 1/2 inches. I like the dogs at the upper end of the standard. I like good size on the dogs. Interestingly, in Switzerland years ago, the smaller dogs were used to drive the cows and the larger ones were used to pull the market carts. They actually had laws that said a dog that was under 23 inches at the shoulder could not pull a cart.

Are people breeding, showing and winning with larger sized dogs?

What we see in the ring today are the smaller sized dogs. When the larger ones come out, even if they are good dogs, they often get lost because the judges think they are too big. I was at a judge's seminar last week and purposely brought a fully mature, large male so the judges could see what a mature dog looked like, and someone in the back of the room said, "That dog is too big. It should never be put up." Just the opposite is true. To me, it is the smaller dogs that do not epitomize what the Bernese Mountain Dogs should be.

Will there be a size problem if this continues towards the lower end of the scale?

People are breeding a smaller dog. So far, we haven't changed our standard.

If people are breeding for a smaller

size, are you also losing the bone?

Yes. Again, the standard calls for a large, sturdy boned dog. That's what we should be putting out there for the judges to see.

What breeding trends have you seen over the years in Bernese?

A much lighter dog, and one whose head is much narrower. People are going for the dog that moves very fast, or the only way it can be shown is if it is moved fast. That kind of gait is incorrect. It tends to be a dog with a high stepping front that is almost a hackneyed gait, flipping the rear legs out. If that dog was put into harness, he would be knocking his legs against the cart every time he pushed off. Our breed is a breed of moderation and we should not have severe angles, with overangulated rears and shoulders.

Are people breeding for what does well in the Group?

Yes. If I had my way, the dog show would end at Best of Breed level. I don't believe in Groups. I don't believe you can judge apples and oranges. If you are judging a Bernese Mountain Dog, that's what you should be judging. Comparing them to Boxers or Rottweilers is wrong. They are totally different breeds.

Are there some breeders who are trying to keep to the standard?

Yes, there are some. Unfortunately, our breed has become more popular and I've seen our specialties grow from 40 or 50 dogs to almost 500. In that time, the breeders haven't taken the time to go back and research what is behind their dogs. As Mary Dawson said, we should remember that there is only one type of Bernese Mountain Dog and we should all be breeding to that type. We should not be producing a West Coast type, or an American type versus a Swiss type. There is only one Bernese Mountain Dog and we should all be breeding to that standard.

How do the American dogs compare to the Swiss dogs?

There is a definite difference. The American dogs are smaller with smaller bone and a racier appearance. The Swiss dogs are bigger with more bone and less angulation, and they usually have lovely heads. People are always saying we need to bring something over to get that, instead of breeding what we have here to get that.

Is Swiss stock often imported?

Yes.

Bar Am Grunberg Ysa at fifteen months.

Do the Swiss dogs do well in the show ring here?

Some of them do and some of them don't. The larger dogs tend not to do as well. They seem to look out of place. The larger dogs will generally do better at the specialties.

Do you special any of your champions?

No. Once my dogs finish their championships, I usually retire them, bring them out for specialties, and that's it. I have never campaigned a dog.

Is there much politicking in the breed?

At some levels, yes. Whenever you are involved in an endeavor where you are selling a product, you tend to get into competition. That's when things turn to politics.

Do Bernese do as well under an all breed judge in an all breed show as they do at a specialty?

That's a hard question to answer. I think the judges are looking for something different. Many of the all breed judges do not have a lot of knowledge of what is behind the Bernese and they are, therefore, doing a generic judging job on soundness and movement, rather than the finer points. Conversely, the breeder-judge is looking at a lot of the finer points and maybe forgiving of overall soundness. Someone once told me the best way to even things out, especially at specialties, since we always look to specialties as where we see the cream of the crop, is that we need to balance, and have an all breed judge one year and a breeder-judge another year so that we keep both type and soundness.

Has the judging at the National Specialties been consistent year after year as to the type of dog being put up?

No. There have been some years when the judging has been extremely good and other years when things haven't been quite as good. Averaged out, it has probably been okay, but there have been a few instances where I have been very concerned with what a judge has done, in terms of the message it sends.

Do your specialties have obedience and tracking?

Over the years, at our National Specialties, we have attempted to showcase everything the dog can do. We have always supported obedience classes, and we offer tracking whenever we are in an area where tracking can be held, and we have done agility. In fact, one of our Midwest breeders was on the AKC panel developing the agility for it to become a performance event. We are doing draft tests at our specialties. We try to offer everything the dogs can do.

Is participation in the events other than Breed good?

It's been very good. That's one thing I have to say about the Bernese Mountain Dog people. They have always supported the breed, so we have large audiences watching the events and the classes are usually filled. I remember in 1988 when we had the specialty in Stowe, Vermont. We weren't sure we would get enough tracking dogs to have the tracking test. Everyone brought out their old dogs to make sure there would be enough dogs to fill up the test for those that needed it. That's the kind of participation we have had from people. They get out and support things.

Grunberg Chester v. Bar (Sennenhof Nounows UD x Liskarn Bequeath Benna).

Are there any health problems in the breed?

Yes. The Bernese Mountain Dog has a problem with cancer, which the club recognized as a problem back in 1987 or 1988. They commissioned a cancer study by Dr. Paget at the University of Michigan and Dr. Madewell at the University of California. We had a tumor registry where people were sending in information. We have a database on Bernese Mountain Dogs that probably rivals any other breed going. The Packards in California have devoted their lives to setting up this database. The club has just set up a foundation, the Bernergarde Foundation, where all this information is. The result of the cancer study was to try to determine if any of the cancers were inherited and if so what we could do to eradicate them. The information from the five-year study is just about to be published now.

What type of cancers do they suffer from?

I believe they have actually identified seven as the major cancers such as lymphosarcoma, and one of those peculiar to Bernese Mountain Dogs is histiocytosis. Interestingly enough, in talking with people in other breeds, you have to wonder how many of the cancers are out there in the other breeds, as well, but people do not have the data to be able to say it is true. I have talked with a lot of people with dogs of other breeds that are dying of cancer.

Are the cancers more prevalent in younger dogs, in older dogs, or is it spread across the life span?

It is spread across the life span. There seems to be a period between three and four where you will lose some dogs, a period between six and eight where you will lose some dogs, and then there are obviously the ones that die of cancer when they are in old age. It was because we were losing a lot of young dogs that the club decided to act. We are looking forward to getting some answers and being able to work with that.

Are there any eye and hip problems?

With any large dog, hips are a problem. The great majority of Bernese breeders are x-raying. As a matter of fact, within the last couple of years, the elbows are also getting x-rayed. It is very difficult to be able to judge the incidence. We are not seeing the crippled dogs, or that many affected dogs being used for breeding, but along with that the ones that don't pass at the local vet don't show up in any database, either. It's hard to tell. Overall, we have probably improved the hip problem. As far as eye problems, in just the last issue of our newsletter, there was a discussion on PRA and that they have five cases on record of PRA. It's one of the things we have to start looking at now when we are choosing our breeding stock.

What makes you decide to have a litter?

Because I have a dog that I think has something to offer and I want to continue that particular thing. I've always had good fronts, good bone and type, and I have wanted to have a dog in the next generation that has those same characteristics.

Do you generally breed within your own kennel or do you go out?

I go out. Because we have a small gene pool, you can find something related outside your own kennel. I go for a dog that will complement what I am doing.

How do you feel about outcrossing, linebreeding and inbreeding?

That's a tough one, too. Inbreeding, of course, is very difficult to do and needs to be done with someone who has a lot of insight into pedigrees and inheritance factors and so forth. If you continue to outcross all the time, you are producing puppies, but you are not producing a line. You need to do a judicious amount of linebreeding, and then go out for what you need to produce a type that is unique to you.

Do you generally keep bitches or males at home?

Usually bitches, because it is difficult to keep more than one breeding male in a household situation. You can go out to the stud and have your bitches at home.

If you have a stud that someone wants to use for breeding, what criteria do you require of the owner of the bitch?

I haven't had a lot of that. Ben was the only actual stud dog I had on the premises. I can remember when he was being shown and doing his winning that I always felt sad he wasn't used as much as those in the urban areas. A friend once told me, "Don't worry. The people who know what he is and why he is there will use him." He's been dead for eight years now, and looking back, I can say he was only used eleven or twelve times. It was judicious use, and I am proud of what has come down from him. When people would call about using Ben, what interested me most was when people could tell me what his faults were, what the faults of their female were and what they hoped to accomplish by breeding to him. As far as requirements, obviously you want the usual number of health tests, such as hips tested, eyes tested and a brucellosis test. Those are all the normal things people ask for, but I was really interested in what people wanted to do with the breeding.

Did you ever require a thyroid or an EKG test to be done?

No, I never did, and it's been a long time since I had an active stud dog. Things have changed since that time.

Would you keep the same criteria if you were going out to use a stud?

Yes.

Have you had any experience with using fresh and frozen semen, or is that done with Bernese Mountain Dogs?

Way back when they first started using frozen semen, one of our specialty winners had some sperm frozen. I am not sure whether they got any puppies from that or not. I have mixed feelings about it. We just had a conversation in New York about it. I have feelings that every dog has his time and that's when he should be used and that we should not be trying to change things by using the sperm 20 years later, five years later, or whatever. The other side of the coin is, if you had something good enough, would you do it? Technology has changed and it is easier to do today. I don't know. I have misgivings about tampering with nature.

If you wanted to use a stud that was in another state, would you ship your bitch or drive out with her?

I have done both. I've driven to the dog, and a couple of times I have been lucky enough to have the owner of the dog allow me to bring it here. I've also shipped the bitch and we've had success doing that.

Do you do anything special for your bitch while she is pregnant?

She obviously has to be in good health before I start so things will go along fine. She gets a normal diet up until a week or two before she has the puppies, and then I will step it up and divide it into smaller meals so she can eat as much and not feel stuffed. I start giving her more once she has had the puppies. That's when the stress is on the bitch and when you need to make sure she has enough milk.

What is a good age to breed a bitch for her first litter?

The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America has a Code of Ethics that requires that you not breed a bitch until after her second season. Generally, that is about two years of age, although sometimes bitches will come in at 20 months and people will breed then. Certainly the bitch should be mature. The problem with Bernese Mountain Dogs is they are not a long-lived breed and our

Left to right: White Sock, Viceroy, "Indypendent," White face, Climber and Stripe (Grunberg Butternut Fudge x Bonz v.d. Wellenried), at five weeks, whelped 11/22/88.

breeding window is from about two to six years of age. Most breeders are retiring their breeding bitches at around age five, so we are talking only two or three litters from any one bitch. We should not breed puppies, however. The bitch has to grow up herself and it is not fair to breed a dog that isn't mature. It's just like teenaged pregnancies, in humans.

Do you supplement your bitch with anything besides her normal rations?

No. A very wise nutritionist once told me to feed a good, balanced diet with a good research program behind it.

Once the bitch has had her litter, how do you raise the puppies and take care of the bitch?

She gets anything she wants for the first two or three weeks until she is really eating well. Then she has food in front of her at all times. Of course, she gets a lot of TLC and I spend a lot of time with the puppies. The puppies are hardy and seem to grow up regardless of what I do.

What is the average size of a newborn Bernese?

Puppies are usually between a pound and a half to two pounds. They are good sized puppies.

What is the average litter size?

Probably the average is seven or eight puppies. I've had bitches produce litters that had anywhere from two to twelve puppies.

How are the puppies weaned and at what age?

I start feeding my puppies at about three weeks of age. They don't get puppy food. They get the regular kibble that mom is eating, which has been ground up and mashed and moistened. They start on that and are pretty much weaned by the time they are five weeks of age.

Can you pick a newborn puppy while it is still wet?

No. The only thing you can do with Bernese puppies as soon as they are born is start culling on markings. If the markings are bad, you know that right away, but that is only the first cull. I probably pick my puppy somewhere between three and five weeks of age. I really wait until they are up on their feet and moving around before I really look at them. I look for a nice square puppy. I have a thing I do, where I put my hand under their chest and bottom and let them hang. I watch how their feet hang. Sometimes I can find bad fronts at that point and feet that are turning out. I like the puppy that is full of himself and trots around the room like a little tank. He is very purposeful and knows what he is doing in life.

When you say you cull mismarked dogs, what do you do with them?

Grunberg Black Mt Tessa (Butternut Right Stuff x Edda vom Sonnenweg), May 1991.

They go to pet homes. In Europe they cull down to a certain number, but my cull is simply which ones I will be looking at later on as show potential, and which ones will be sold right away as pets.

Is there a lot of mismarking?

It's very difficult to get symmetrical markings. We are one of the few breeds that, when showing a brace, it is very hard to get two dogs that look exactly alike. They are all different. You can have a whole litter with too much white and a whole litter with not enough white. I have a litter now that is three weeks old and we have a blue-eyed dog in the litter, which is an automatic cull, as far as a pet is concerned.

In Bernese, then, you know very early on which puppies are going into pet homes and which can be shown, according to the markings?

You know right away which ones are going into pet homes because of markings, and then out of what is left you have to choose those going into pet homes because of their conformation.

Do you have a problem finding homes for the Bernese?

No, and probably the number one problem in the breed right now is that we have a population explosion. Making sure we get the dogs into proper homes is more important.

At what age do you let them go to their new homes?

It is usually between eight and ten weeks. If the puppy is going to be shipped, I like to keep it for ten weeks, but if the puppy will be picked up here at the house, I will let it go at eight weeks.

If a newcomer to the breed calls wanting a puppy, what do you require of them before you will let them have one of your puppies?

The first thing I ask is, "Why do you want a Bernese? What do you think they are?" If they have no knowledge of the Bernese Mountain Dog at all, I suggest they go to someone who lives in their area who has them so they can see what they look like. Their size is very imposing and a cute, cuddly little puppy is irresistible, but when you have 120 pounds of dog that is shedding in your home, it's not quite so cute anymore. I want to make sure the person is committed to actually wanting the breed. Then I ask the obvious questions about whether or not they've ever had a dog before, if they have a veterinarian. It's always nice to hear that their last dog died at eleven or twelve years of age and that they are looking for a replacement. I've been very fortunate in placing my puppies. When looking at 26 or 27 litters of puppies, I am only actually looking at 80 or 90 puppies overall, and over the years I have been very fortunate in that there have been only one or two placements where I have been concerned about the dog.

Are there some situations where you will not sell a puppy to people because they have six small children or they live in an apartment complex?

I won't sell a Bernese to a city home. I don't think it is fair to the owner or to the dog. You may say you are very committed to getting the dog out and walking it, but that's an everyday commitment of 365 days a year and there are very few people who can do that. I admire the people who do, but I very seldom, if ever, sell a dog into a city situation. As far as children are concerned, I like to have the people come to my home so I can meet them with their children. I can find out a lot by spending an hour or two with people and their children to see how they interact with the dogs and how the parents interact with the children with the dogs. If the parents are tuned into what the kids are doing and are careful, and so forth, then there is no problem putting a puppy in that home – with the proper education, that is, and letting them know what they have to do as far as training and allowing the puppy time on its own so it is away from the children so it can rest. I have one right now that is in a home with a three-year-old and it is doing wonderfully. Bernese are pretty knock-around dogs.

Grunberg Desha, "Desi" (Grunberg Xactly Right x Northwind Heather Bloom), whelped 4/9/94.

By saying you won't sell to those in a city, are you implying the Bernese needs a great deal of vigorous exercise?

No. They are not like a hound or a Siberian. They actually tend to mold themselves to your lifestyle, but they are a big dog and need some walking. I do not think the city is the place to do it.

Do you have an information packet you give to new owners?

I have a booklet we've put together that has all kinds of articles on housebreaking, health problems, first-aid for the dog, and it has the history and the standard of the breed. There are things about obedience training and training your puppy. I usually put some of the dog food pamphlets on how to raise a puppy in there, as well. The new owner has generally seen the video on the breed, and I give them a list of books that are available. In fact, usually when they first come to see the dog, they will get the list of what books are available so they can find out more about the breed.

Grunberg Uri, 1990. Good head.

Do the Bernese puppies grow by leaps and bounds over a very short period of time?

Yes. The Bernese puppy at eight weeks is somewhere around eighteen to 20 pounds. My three-week-old puppies are seven pounds right now. As a general rule of thumb, we say they will put on about ten pounds a month, so it is a dog that in six months' time will go from 20 pounds to 80 or 90. The problem is that while the dog has physically made that rapid development, the brain has not. (laughter) It is very important that owners recognize that this large dog is still a baby in diapers, and they need to train the dog early so they will have a dog they can enjoy.

Do you keep your dogs on the adult food all the time they are growing up?

I do feed Ken'l Biskit and I have fed it for years and years. They get straight Ken'l Biskit, dry, with nothing added. Years ago, I went to a seminar put on by a canine nutritionist who said the puppy food for our dogs came about as a result of a marketing study, which said that if the American people will buy baby food for their babies, they will buy puppy food for their dogs. It was never really a nutritional need. If they have a good quality, all-around dog food, that's all they need.

Do you supplement the puppies with vitamins?

No. I don't supplement my adult dogs, either. The only time a dog is supplemented here is if it is having a health problem and needs something extra.

Do you advise your new puppy owners to enroll in a puppy kindergarten or a puppy obedience class?

Yes. They are a rapid growing, large dog that needs to be trained early on. Of course, it is good socialization for the puppy to be among other dogs, as well. People need to be careful which obedience class they choose, because there aren't any quality controls on some of the trainers and I have a lot of concerns about some of the different training methods that are out there.

What recommendations do you give to the new puppy person, as far as finding a class?

I suggest they watch a couple of classes and talk with some of the people who have been to the classes, if they can, to find out what results other people have found. I have started writing it into my contract that the dog will never be put on a prong collar, because that seems to be the panacea in training today, the quick fix. The Bernese Mountain Dog does not need a prong collar to perform, in my opinion.

Are they an easy dog to train?

They are very easy to train, but they are very sloppy workers. They will say, "Okay, I sat. Why does it have to be straight?"

Are they easily bored?

They probably are. I have to qualify that because I am not an obedience person. If the dog comes when I call it and sits when I ask it to, and does a relatively good job of staying when I ask it to stay, that's good enough. I am not into the perfection and drill work of obedience. They are tractable, calm, quiet dogs, for the most part.

What are some of the typical problems new puppy owners might run into when they get a Bernese puppy?

The biggest problem I have had to deal with over the years is the fact that they have this rapidly growing dog they have allowed to chew or nip and it becomes a problem. We try to maintain contact with puppy people so they can let us know what is happening and we can get any problems corrected early on.

So, they are avid chewers then when they are cutting their teeth, and one must beware for their table and chair legs?

Absolutely. They are like any other puppy.

Do you have to be careful with the Bernese as it is growing up, as is done in other large breeds where caution is necessary when exercising them?

You have to be careful because they will bang into things, or run into each other or you full tilt. You want to control their exercise a little bit. You certainly would not want to begin any kind of draft work until you have a more mature dog whose bones are more mature and whose musculature is developed so they are able to do the work.

Do they suffer from OCD, or other problems, as do other rapid growing breeds?

Yes. There is a certain amount of panostitis out there and there is OCD. As we are now x-raying more elbows, we are looking at that as a problem, too.

In view of this, what recommendations would you give to the novice owner as far as exercising their growing puppy?

I like the dog to rise to its own level of exercise. Most of my owners or homes have fenced-in yards and I suggest the dog be allowed to run and play – again, limiting any real roughhousing with any other adult dogs – but allowing them their freedom so they can get the kinks out. I do not believe in a lot of heavy roadwork with a young dog. The Bernese are smart enough to sit down and say, "I'm tired."

At what age is the Bernese fully matured?

The dog is not mature until it is at least three years of age, and maybe even a little bit after that. One of the problems I see in the ring today is the vast majority of our dogs are finishing before they are two years of age, or when they are two years of age, so the judges are not seeing fully mature animals in the show ring. The only time you see the mature dogs out is at specialties and the difference is like day and night. They truly take three years to mature.

Why do people finish them so young?

As far as the bitches are concerned, you want to finish them so you can breed them. With the dogs, it's a feather in your cap if you have finished a young animal. A few years back, when the AKC was trying to change the classes and do away with the Best of Winners and withhold the championships until a dog was at least eighteen months of age, I was all for that change. I would love to go to a European system where the young dogs cannot finish their championship. My grandmother had a saying, "Only fools and children look at unfinished things." There are a lot of fools out there in the dog show game.

Might that lead someone to choose the breed, thinking it was a smaller breed than it actually is?

It's not really size we are talking about because the two-year-old Bernese Mountain Dog has reached its full height. It's a matter of bulking out at that point. If you have a dog that is 27 inches at the shoulders at that point, he will be 27 inches at the shoulders at five years of age, as well. That's not the problem so much as the judges not seeing the mature dog.

Do most of the Bernese go to companion homes, or do a lot of them go to show homes?

I can't speak for other breeders, but the majority of my puppies go to companion homes. They have to be taken care of whether they are in a companion home or a show home. I want them to be in a home as a pet first, anyway.

Do you co-own any of your dogs?

Yes. They need to be with people. They are a farmer's dog and enjoy people. I like to keep them in homes, but I can't keep a lot of dogs myself, and co-ownerships make that possible. You have to be very careful when entering into co-ownerships to determine why the person wants the dog and why it will allow it to be bred. I've had some co-ownerships where the animal has never been shown or bred.

How do you work your co-ownerships?

They are individual, depending on the dog, really. On some of the co-ownerships I keep my name on, to have some input as to what is happening with the dog. As far as bitches are concerned, the co-ownership is when they are bred and it is at a mutually agreed upon time with a mutually agreed upon stud, with all expenses split down the middle. Likewise, any revenue from it is split down the middle.

Do you take puppies back?

If there is a puppy from the litter that I want, I will. Most of the time, if I have put a dog into a co-ownership home it is because I want that dog as part of my breeding program. That's why it is on a co-ownership, so I am looking for more than a puppy back. However, I don't believe in some of these arrangements where people get every puppy, or most of the puppies, or the bitch is bred every season. Our code of ethics says we do not breed every season. It has to be a mutually agreed-upon thing or it does not work.

How much coat preparation is involved when showing the Bernese?

You should not have to do anything. Our standard says the Bernese Mountain Dog in the show ring is a cleaner, neater version of the farm dog. You should only clip around the feet to clean them up a little bit and perhaps a little around their ears. There should not be any undue trimming. It is not correct to scissor them. We've seen some of that happening in the ring today. It is not correct to tease them up and mousse them. They should be shown in their natural state. That's one of the things I like about the dog because I don't like to spend a lot of time brushing a dog. They are drip dry.

So, the primping and overgrooming is beginning to creep in?

Yes, it is. Again, it goes along with what you have to do to win at the Group level. It is very unfortunate and it is not correct.

Grunberg Uri, 1989.

Do you see as much of that going on at a specialty as you do at an all breed show?

The people who are doing it at an all breed show will prepare their dogs the same way at a specialty. You will see a certain number of dogs that have been groomed beyond what is necessary.

I have heard from some breeders that breeder knowledge of animal husbandry years ago was much better than it is today. How important is good animal husbandry in raising and breeding dogs?

It is true in any breed that as you begin to get the explosions of new breeders into a breed, they are there for various reasons. There are exceptions to it, of course, but some are not there for the breed itself. You have to know how to raise, take care of and train a dog before you can actually produce good dogs. One thing I used to tell new people is, "You have to bury your firstborn homebred puppy of old age before you know anything about that breed." It takes a long time. It doesn't happen overnight. Learning is trial and error.

Do you do any of the work AKC is encouraging now, besides conformation?

Yes, but as I said, I'm not into exactness and I have never put an obedience degree on any of my dogs, although some of my dogs have gone on to get their obedience degrees. I sent a dog to England in whelp. She had her puppies there, and one of those puppies produced a litter. Out of that litter, one of those puppies came back to this country and he is the only Bernese Mountain Dog to earn a 200 score in obedience. He now has his CDX, and he was top Novice A Bernese Mountain Dog and he is top Open A dog this year.

Do you do any agility or drafting with your dogs?

I do drafting. I have done draft work that goes back to when I had Rottweilers. We always did the parade version of draft work just to show off that our dogs could draft. When we started working up the regulations for the draft trials, I helped in terms of participating so that we could see how they were going to work. A funny thing that happened was when I went to our first draft match that was ever held in this country. I had a dog that was trained to a cart, but had no obedience training. The first regulations required that the dogs be obedience trained. I thought that was wrong. I believed there was a distinct place for draft work and a distinct place for obedience and you could test the dog's control in either one. So, I went to the first draft match with my dog and I entered. When we got into the ring, the judge said, "Take off the dog's leash and do the obedience." I said, "We can't." The judge was an obedience judge and she asked, "What do you mean?" I said, "The dog is not obedience trained." She said again, "What do you mean the dog is not obedience trained?" I said, "He is not obedience trained. I am here to participate because this is the first time we have ever done it in this country." We did participate. One of the dogs that had an obedience degree was new to carting. She was petrified and took off with her cart trailing behind. Another dog that was very well obedience trained was being pushed by the cart. When Rik was harnessed to his cart and went out on the freight haul, he got to the first hill, started going down and when he felt the push of the cart, he backed into his harness and walked his cart down the hill. He knew what he was doing and didn't need a degree to tell him how to take care of that cart, and he was under control. He has never earned a draft degree because I have never taken him through all of the steps to do it.

Dr. Francke with Maggie.

What age would you begin training a dog to a cart?

I don't think a dog should be doing carting until it is about two years of age. You can break them to a harness and teach them what carts are, but before they start pulling weights and so forth, they really need to be fully mature.

What is involved in a carting test?

We have a ring set up with a course within it, and you must take your dog into the ring. The dog must stand still while the cart and harness are brought into the ring. The dog is harnessed and the cart is put on. This exercise is to show the dog is in control and will accept the harness and cart without any problem. Then you maneuver around the course. There is a figure eight you must work your dog and cart around without the cart touching anything. We have to go through a gate that has only a couple of inches of clearance on either side of the cart. That is another control exercise where the dog is aware of the size of the cart behind him. The dog must be able to back up, and the dog must stop while you load and unload the cart. The dog must be in control when a stranger comes up to you and talks to you while the dog is harnessed. When someone makes a loud noise, the dog must not startle.

After you have completed the ring work, the dog is put into a long stay. The dog can be left in any position, but he must stay and not move until you return to the cart. Again, that is another

Left: Grunberg Black Mt Tessa. Right: Ch. Grunberg Ura. May 1991.

control exercise. This is to simulate what the dog would do if it were on the streets in Switzerland and what would be happening to it while there. Then the cart is loaded and the dog goes out on a half mile freight haul, which the dog must accomplish without any problem. You must be aware of your equipment and everything has to check out. There are no scores to it. The dog either passes or fails.

Are there many people involved in carting?

More and more people are becoming involved. The first time I went in just because I wanted to participate, people came up to me on the outside of the ring and said, "How did you dare do that? I was so scared to do it." I said, "I just wanted to participate. It didn't matter whether I passed or not. I just wanted to be part of it." That helped some people in our area decide that they wanted to do it, too. We've had three or four actual draft tests now at specialties. We also have them in different regions. There are quite a few dogs now that have their draft titles. It is a sport that is taking off. At our Kansas City specialty in 1993, they actually had a mass parade and had over 45 carts there that day participating in the parade.

That must have been very impressive to see.

It was. It was a costume parade, so we had everything from a whole wagon train dressed in western costumes to the more traditional Swiss carts.

How long does it take to train the dogs for carting and testing?

It depends on the dog, and I am probably the wrong person to ask. I have had a dog train in a couple of days to be trustworthy with a cart and I have had other dogs that have taken a little bit longer. They seem to be naturals to it. I had one dog that was able to go inside a crowded shopping mall at Christmas and maneuver the cart in and around the crowds and on and off the elevator with no problems whatsoever. That dog had only been in training for four or five months at that time. How quickly the dog takes to it depends on how you approach it.

Does your national breed club encourage participation in tracking, agility and carting?

Yes. These events are at our specialties. We have quite a few regional clubs now and several of them are offering the draft tests and some of the agility work. One of the problems we have as a national club is how to fit everything into four or five days of a specialty. When we look at a single exercise to determine if we want to do away with it, there are enough people there who say, "No. We need that." We are up to a four-day specialty now. (laughter)

Are all of the dogs that do the carting also champions, and do some of the dogs just get involved in agility and tracking and not become involved in conformation?

I think it is probably a 50-50 split. Many of our champions have obedience degrees and draft titles, and there are a certain number of pet dogs that do the agility and draft work. As the draft test is now set up, it is a two-step title. A Novice Draft Dog does not need the obedience training and does not have to pull heavy weights. It's a place for the pet owners who just want to participate. The Open Draft Dog, which is the dog we actually call the draft dog, has to do it off-lead and has to pull heavy loads. It's a more sophisticated part of the test. We have made a place for the person who only wants to cart and for the person who wants to go on and do some heavy-duty work.

How much weight do the dogs pull?

You've got me there. I'd have to look it up.

Does a dog go just once to get the carting title, or is there continuing competition?

It's like a tracking title. They have the title and there is no competition then.

Have you done any tracking with your dogs?

I have not tracked my Bernese Mountain Dogs. I used to do tracking with my Rottweilers. A Rottweiler that I bred is the only Rottweiler, and I think the only dog of several breeds, that passed thirteen tracking tests.

Do many Bernese get tracking titles?

Not as many as there could be. I think they are probably good trackers, but not a lot of people take the time to do the tracking.

Has the national breed club's code of ethics helped the breed?

The code of ethics is only as good as the signature of the person signing it. If more people paid better attention to the code of ethics in any breed, things would be better. For some people, it is just a signature and it means nothing. Overall, it probably has helped.

Does your national club provide a lot of support to its members?

The national club has always been education-oriented, attempting to help the newcomer, as well as the old-timer. We have an educational program. We have had judge's seminars for six or seven years. This past year, we have started offering the same seminar to the membership. We have the research programs I already mentioned. We have a couple of veterinarians in our membership who are our health committee and who keep us up-to-date on any health issues that might be coming along with respect to our breed. The national club has been very instrumental in trying to educate its members.

As a whole, do the people of this breed share information with each other about problems in the breed?

We have. As we are exploding, it will become more and more difficult to do. The fact we have a database that has been promoted by the national club has been most responsible for information sharing.

Is the AKC video on the Bernese Mountain Dog a good one?

I helped make it. (laughter) In anything you attempt to do, it can always be made better. We had to work with the dogs we had available, so there are parts of it I like very much and parts of it that I don't like.

Is it a good video for someone to watch who is interested in learning about the breed?

Yes. Our video committee was actually a good committee. We looked backwards. We went to our slide show. The early slide show script was put together by some of our early breeders. When we started trying to come up with a script for the video, we asked, "What is better than what we have? Why should we change it?" With just a few exceptions to putting the motion in, we used the early work that was done for the slide show in making our video.

Is the national club a good resource for novice breeders?

I like to think we are. We probably could do better. We are a membership of over 700 now. As we've grown, it has become more difficult to keep in touch with all the newcomers. We've probably started looking towards our regional clubs to do some of that. The Bernese Mountain Dog Club celebrated its 25th anniversary a couple of years back and in that 25 years we have done a lot of growing.

Is there enough good literature available for the novice person?

No. There is always room for more. There are a couple of good publications out. Unfortunately, some of the best work is in German and not readily available to the American novice breeder. One of the best books ever written was written by a breeder in Switzerland, Margaret Bartschi. It is probably one of the best genetic books ever written on the breed, or on many breeds, but it is in German. We have a couple of books in English and there is another one that is due out in March of 1995. As time goes on, I am sure there will be more and more for people to read.

Ch. Grunberg Kalais (Ch. Shepherd's Patch Carl B x Asta v. Gitzirain), first Bernese exported to England; granddam of Liskarn America Bound Jerry. Only BMD to get 200 score in obedience.

Are the novices who are coming into the breed today in a hurry to breed their dogs, or are they being careful?

They tend to want to come along very quickly. You have to wonder sometimes if some of the easy co-ownership arrangements might be part of the problem. They get into breeding in ten easy steps without ever having to do any of the work behind it. The novices do not look backwards to the history to find out what is behind the dogs they are working with, so they know what they have in faults and virtues to work with.

Is this becoming more of a problem?

It's a problem, but I do not think it is correctable. As we grow, there are going to be a certain percentage of people who have no background and who will come and go in any breed. We have to offer them the help they need, hope they take some of that help and move on. You can't spend a lot of time worrying about what everybody else is doing. You have to set your own goals and work towards them.

Do you advise your puppy buyers to join a local breed club, the national club and/or an all breed club?

Yes. Some breeders even offer a membership in the New England regional club with the sale of a puppy. I've never really caught on to that. People should join something because they want to. Our New England club is actually very good. We send in names of our puppy buyers, and the club will send a copy of our newsletter to those people for three months so the puppy buyer has some inkling of what is going on in the neighborhood. We encourage it in that

Grunberg Uri at ten months.

way.

Are there any medications the Bernese do not tolerate very well?

I can only speak from experiences I am familiar with. I don't like using anesthesia on my dogs, so my vet goes very easy with anesthesia. They are a very hardy dog and are very good in the vet's office. I have had dogs have surgery without any anesthesia, using just a local anesthetic. We try to use that as much as possible.

What do you tell a new owner about choosing a veterinarian?

Usually, the buyer already has a vet before he/she buys a puppy, unless it is a first-time owner. If they have never been to a vet before, I suggest they go through some local all breed club to get references on vets.

Is there anything you tell your new puppy buyers to look for, as far as particular health problems in the Bernese, such as cancer, that they should tell their vet?

It's the more obvious things, like the dog being off its feed, the dog that has slowed down, and you look for obvious things like lumps and bumps. Generally, it is the dog that just isn't right. For some reason, the dog is not up to par. One of the problems with the Bernese Mountain Dogs is they are very stoic dogs, and you often will not notice anything until it is very well advanced. They are truly stoic as far as what they will take as far as pain and sickness before they will actually show signs. The owners need to be well aware of what their dogs are like normally and be very sensitive to any subtle changes. When you are grooming the dog is the best time to find anything, as far as skin lesions or anything like that. Obviously, regular grooming is very important. You should know your dog intimately.

Do you bathe them very often?

I don't do a lot of bathing. I'm a very lazy groomer. They get their baths before a dog show, and the rest of the crowd that is not being shown will get maybe one or two baths a year.

How long does it take to dry a Bernese?

I used a force drier. It takes a good hour and a half to two hours and then they are sort of damp for a while.

Has it been worth being in the breed all these years?

Oh, yes. I'm not ready to change. I don't know what life would be like without one of them leaning on me.

Then, you are happy with your decision?

I'm very happy.

Has it changed your lifestyle a great deal?

(laughter) Is there ANY dog person who can say it hasn't changed his/her lifestyle? I have a friend who has one of my Bernese. He was an older dog when she took him. When she came here, she was dressed in a very lovely ivory cape. Since then, she has switched from her Saab to a station wagon and tweeds.

What have been the benefits for you of having the Bernese?

For me, they are such a loving dog. They enjoy being with you so much. It's the companionship of a very devoted dog. I used to describe the temperament of one of my dogs as, "You want me to die? Tell me when and where." That's the kind of unconditional love they give you.

Are there any drawbacks?

Every time I lose a dog, I say, "Do I want to go through this again? Why am I doing it?" But then one comes up and puts its head in my lap and looks at me; how can I refuse? I love them so much I truly can't see myself without one. I wonder what I will be like in old age.

Have you done any therapy dog work where you go to visit nursing homes or hospitals with your Bernese?

I work at a mental institution, and I have worked there for 30 years. My dogs have been going there for 30 years. We've never taken part in any organized therapy situations, but the dogs seem to instinctively know why they are there. In rural Vermont, being able to socialize young dogs is sometimes hard, especially in the winter. It was always very easy to take the puppies in, drop them into somebody's lap and have them play with the puppies. Everyone at the hospital thought I was doing it for the patients' benefit, but it was really for the benefit of my dogs. It was a two-way street, however. Today, I am very proud that a great-granddaughter of one of my dogs is the official library dog at the hospital. She comes in with her owner who volunteers once a week and Barry is known to all of the patients.

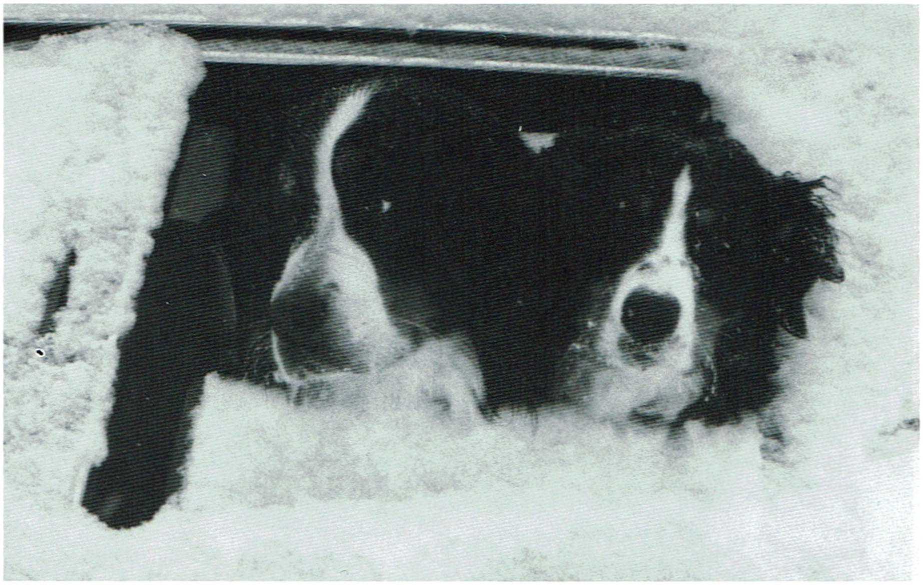
Do you bring any of your adults in, or just puppies?

The adults go in. Often, we are making switches with one dog going off to a show or one coming back, and it is very easy for it to happen at work. Although it is forbidden to have animals in the buildings, the dogs come and go at will. We use the term "therapy," and they seem to be able to go wherever they want. Ironically, I spent years taking the dogs to the geriatric wards, the wards where the mentally disabled were, and one day one of my supervisors said, "Would you take the dog to the maximum security unit?" I'd never thought about going there. I happened to have a young male dog with me and I took him up to the maximum security unit. When you go on the units with the dogs, the remarks are always something like, "Oh, what a big dog!" or "Oh, what a beautiful dog!" When I got to the maximum security unit, the first thing they said was, "What big teeth they have!" (laughter) The dog was fine. He sat there with his mouth open, showing them his teeth. The dogs get surrounded by the patients. There is usually a patient who has a special interest, I hand them the leash and go off and do something else and the dogs just have a wonderful time. They seem to sense when there is someone who isn't interested in them and they tend to stay away from that person.

One of the people who co-owns a dog with me works with special education students and she has a severely disabled one now. She has a male dog that is sort of standoffish with strangers. She took the student to her house. While she was there, this very standoffish male walked over and put his head into the child's lap and just sat there, allowing himself to be petted. Dogs just instinctively know when they can help.

Another one of my dogs lives with a therapist and goes to work with her every day and sleeps under her desk. One day she was dealing with a patient who all of a sudden tuned out and was in another world. No matter what the therapist did, she couldn't seem to reach her. The dog got out from under the desk and went over and stood in front of the patient and stood there and looked at her. All of a sudden the patient put her hands around the dog and burst into tears. The therapist had not been able to reach her, but the dog did.

Bernese Mountain Dogs go everywhere and are usually welcome. They are usually ladies and gentlemen when they are there. One owner describes them as being big dogs, but gentle-big. I think I started taking my dogs with me to the mental hospital before they had an organized therapy group. We were at a dog show in Canada once, which was next to a children's hospital, and they brought a group of the children through the dog show. They were severely disabled children. Some of them had cerebral palsy, some of them could not look straight ahead, and their hands were useless to them, and so forth. People were moving out of the way of the wheelchairs. My dog was very used to these things because she had been to the hospital so many times. When one of the chairs came up and they stopped, I tapped the top of the tray and the dog put its front feet up on the tray and licked the child's face. There was a smile on the child's face. The person who was taking care of the child was so thankful. If more people would spend time interacting with their dogs and other people, this world would be a better place .



Bernese in their favorite season.

Do people socialize their Bernese enough?

Yes, I think so. The dogs are so easy to live with and get along with that people tend to take them more places, so they get out and around. We encourage this in puppy owners. Here in New England, we encourage so many different activities with the dogs, not just the show. We have always expected them to behave and they usually do. It's not unusual to be at a dog show at a motel and everybody gather in somebody's room to sit and chat. Everyone will bring his or her dog and you might have seven or eight dogs in a room. None of them are related and none of them know each other. Each one finds a space and lies down and there are no problems.

Even the males?

Even the males. I once showed a brace of males. They didn't look like each other, but somebody dared me to do it. I did, and we went Best Brace in Show. One of the most remarkable things about it was, both of the males were stud dogs. I put them together that morning and off we went, with no training. (laughter) They are very placid.

Have you ever gotten a puppy back from a puppy buyer because of a bad situation?

Over the years, I have gotten about four dogs back. Once it was because the people were moving. Once it was because the dog grew too big and it wasn't what they expected. Those are very sad situations. The regional Bernese Mountain Dog clubs are very active in Bernese rescue, and we are seeing more dogs come through rescue, which is an indication that breeders are not screening their buyers as well as they should. Dogs should be coming back through their breeders, rather than having to go through rescue; however, we have a very active rescue service in New England that takes care of these animals when they are in need.

Are the dogs being rescued the younger dogs?

From what I have heard, it is mostly the adolescent male that is feeling its oats and hasn't had the proper training. It is headstrong and the owner doesn't know how to control it. The person did not start soon enough to train the dog.

Does rescue have problems finding homes for the dogs?

No. We've been very fortunate. We have a wonderful rescue coordinator who works very hard at her job and screens the people very carefully. The dogs are also screened. We have a very elaborate system in place to take care of these dogs. The dogs are totally screened for both health and temperament problems before they are even offered through rescue. Then we have a support system for the family. Every year at our match or our regional specialty, we parade the dogs into the ring and make the people feel a part of the group. They get a little ribbon or

Ch. Grunberg Ura, daughter of Brie, mother of Zyta, May 1991.

memento that they are our stars.

Are the rescues spayed or neutered?

Yes. They are spayed or neutered before they go to their new homes.

Do you ever sell any of your own puppies on the AKC limited registration?

Yes. I also sell them on spay/neuter contracts. If the dog is not going to be used in a breeding program, then I want it neutered or spayed.

At what age are the dogs usually spayed or neutered?

If it is a dog that has been sold strictly as a pet, then I suggest they have it done at six months or before the first season. If it is a dog that I have some questions about, then I ask the people to bring the dog back to me when it is about a year of age so I can look at it and see where to go from there.

Have you had any problems enforcing the spay/neuter agreements?

In all of my years, I have only had one puppy that produced a litter that wasn't supposed to. I was very angry and she was spayed before her next season.

Are there any problems with puppy mill breeders in Bernese?

There have been two that I know of, and I am sure there are others I don't know about. There are some places that are breeding too frequently and the motive behind a breeding may be profit. The person selling dogs should make sure where their puppies are going, so they don't get into breeding situations like that.

Does the Bernese rescue put down the name of the breeder of the dog that is being rescued?

We haven't done that; however, if we can find out who the breeder of the dog is, the breeder is contacted first before anything else is done. So far, in most cases the breeder has wanted to become involved in what is happening to the dog.

Do most Bernese breeders, in general, provide adequate support for the owners of their dogs?

I can only speak for myself. I would like to think everyone else is taking care of their dogs, but I don't know that for a fact. It's on my sales contract that I want first refusal if the dog is ever to be moved to a new home. I have never refused to take a dog back if it needed to come here. For the most part, I've had good rapport with my puppy buyers.

Are there any particular dogs of yours that stand out in your mind?

The first big winner is always very special and Ben was very special to me. I have him on video and when I look at him, I think he could go out and compete with today's dogs. I've been very fortunate in that I've had some mothers and daughters that have been very nice. Grunberg Butternut Fudge, "Brie," was Reserve at the 1986 National Specialty. She produced "Ura" who has been a very nice bitch. Someone once asked me, when I have criticized or faulted one of my dogs, "How can you say that about your own dog?" Each one has its virtues and faults, but Brie, Ura and Ura's daughter "Zyta" have been three that have epitomized what I have been trying to produce in type.

Have they come the closest to the breed standard?

For me, yes.

What are their registered names?

Grunberg Butternut Fudge is Brie, Ch. Grunberg Ura is Ura and Ch. Grunberg, Zyta. I don't like to use a lot of different names. Brie's grandmother was Asta, my Swiss bitch, the one that had the most wonderful temperament. She is the one about whom I said, "Do you want me to die? Tell me when and where." She was the matriarch of this place and took care of all the puppies while she was alive.

Was there one litter that was most special to you?

Probably most special would be Brie's last litter, when I lost Brie and had orphan puppies. I would never wish that on anyone else. That was the litter I was closest to because I was their mother.

Who was the sire of that litter?

The sire was Ch. Lake House Count Jim In, a Wisconsin dog. He was killed a couple of weeks after the litter was born, so it was a very special litter.

Have there been other males that have left their mark on your kennel?

Ben has been my only stud dog and I've usually gone out to other studs. I'm always looking for the perfect stud dog in my puppies. Two of the orphan puppies were actually dogs I have used in my breeding program. One of them, Exactly Right, was Reserve winner at a National, and his brother Xerox, or "Copy," (laughter) has also produced some nice puppies. His grandchildren (littermates) were WD and WB at the National Specialty in April 1995.

Who do you have up and coming now?

I don't have anyone that is out there right now. I have a ten-month-old puppy that we are getting ready to show this year. I have a three-year-old bitch that we are hoping to get out this year, too. Her name is Ysa. She is a daughter of Brie's brother, Right Stuff.

Where do you generally show?

There are only two people in the United States who have been to every National Specialty. Ben's breeder is one, and I'm the other one. Every year, we have a rivalry going, trying to guess which one is going to miss first. (laughter) The regional specialties have just started up. We had the second one in New England last June. I'm going to a regional being held in Wisconsin in March. I do all breed showing as well, although not as much as I used to do. I'm hoping Ysa is going to do okay. She is a pretty girl.

Is there anything you would like to talk about that we haven't covered yet?

There is one thing I would like to say in terms of breeders who are putting their dogs in the ring, and they are looking at the judges and how the judging goes. There are two people who are responsible for a dog's win, the person who puts the dog in the ring and the judge who puts the dog up. We tend to spend a lot of time berating the judges, who can only judge what is in the ring for them to judge. Some of the responsibility must fall on the person who is showing the dog, and the breeder who is putting the dogs in the ring. They need to spend more time putting in dogs that truly address the standard to give the judge something to work with, rather than complain all the time it is the judge's fault. It is not always the judge's fault.

Do a lot of people use handlers with Bernese, and is that an advantage?

There are two schools of thought on that. Handlers are professionals at their jobs who show the dogs to their advantage. Usually, when a dog is with a handler, it shows itself better. Handlers hit Bernese Mountain Dogs big time about three or four years ago, and we are seeing more and more handlers showing them.

Are there more professional handlers now than owner-handlers?

No. The dog that won at the Garden this past week was handled by a young owner who shows her dog to perfection. She also won the regional specialty in New Jersey. If a good dog is there, the judge will find it. Handlers have their place in the sport. I've just found out how much they can do for me since I can't get to the shows and show the dogs as well as I used to. It doesn't matter so much who is on the end of the leash as what is on the end of the leash. You have to put something in there that deserves to win. You should not be going to a show unless you are there to win and unless you believe the dog you are putting into the ring can do that.

Years ago, when I would win consistently, the local exhibitors would sometimes say, "Hurry up and get them through. Let's make sure we have enough of an entry to get them out of the way so we can win." That's not the right attitude. We should be out there to win and be able to beat the dog you are losing to. I wish more people would show their champions in the Open class and continue to compete. This business of moving a dog up and getting it out of the way so somebody else can finish isn't right. They should all be competing on the same ground.

In England, the champions have to compete with and be better than the dogs in the Open class.

That's the way it should be. About 60 or 70 percent of our champions have finished in the past seven or eight years in our breed. That's putting a lot of dogs out there and we have to consider whether they are all worthy of being called champions. Beyond that, we have to ask if it is worthy of breeding and whether it has anything to offer the breed. Maybe it doesn't.

Now, the AKC judge has to sign something that says the dog that won is worthy of the points. Do you think sometimes the judges just put the dogs up regardless of how good they are?

Sometimes one tends to be in the judging arena looking towards their next assignment, and if they withhold ribbons or don't give out awards, I believe they wonder how long they will be around. That's the wrong attitude to have. Our judges should have more backbone in terms of being able to say, "No, I don't like the dog and I won't put it up."

After breeder-judges have gone for a while without having a litter, are they still in tune with the breed?

In our breed, our breeder-judges do. We are still small enough that they are an integral part of our network and are used very actively by the regionals and the local clubs. One thing we have done quite successfully recently is to have European style matches where these judges come out and give critiques on the breed. Those have been well received. The breeders are actually looking for the judge who can tell them why their dogs placed where they placed and what the judge thinks of their dogs. The American judges get off the hook. They don't have to do anything but hand out the ribbon, shake your hand and say, "Thank you very much." When you have to start justifying what you have done, you have to give a little more thought to what you are doing. As an exhibitor, when you hear an honest critique of your dog, you might learn something from it.

Will this work towards having better stock in the conformation shows?

I would hope so. I would like to see the Nationals have to give a critique. I remember years ago Kitty Drury did one of our National Specialties and she gave each one of us a typed critique on our dogs. She tape recorded it at the time in the ring, and then we received the typed critique a week or two later in the mail. It was wonderful to get something that said, "I looked at your dog and this is what I found." If the judge is judging to the standard, then you will find out how your dog stacks up to the standard, instead of chasing blue ribbons.

Thanks so much for taking the time for this interview! •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Mrs. Joe (Christine) Pike
PIKE'S
Sequim, Washington

This interview was conducted at the home of Mrs. Joe (Christine) Pike in June of 1995 by Barb Matson.

How long have you been in dogs and how did you get started?

I got my first dog in 1952. I started out with a Pekingese and then a Pomeranian. When my daughter was born in 1956, we added some Shelties and a Longhaired Dachshund. She was interested in obedience and showing. She showed her first dog, a Pomeranian, on her eleventh birthday. She got acquainted with other breeds through showing, and added a few Pembroke Welsh Corgis. She did excellently with those in obedience and had some high scoring dogs in trial at nine months. She became acquainted with a lady in Seattle who got her into tracking, and then she showed in conformation for other people in other breeds.

What is your daughter's name?

Marlene.

Was she the one who always went into the ring with the dogs?

Yes. She became interested in the Bernese 26 years ago. She and my husband came home and said, "We've seen the dog we've got to have!" My husband was all hot and bothered about the Bernese. It so happened that the gentleman who was at the show they had been to had one for sale. They came home on a Sunday and on Monday we had a Bernese. The strange thing is, the Bernese we got was a littermate to the famous Bella's Clara that was actually the start of the whole Bernese breed in the United States.

Who did you get the first Bernese from?

Thompson from the Bella line. He brought his over from Switzerland. I had a choice between "Clara" and "Cluney" and we chose Cluney. She had something wrong with her uterus and had to be spayed, so we never had a puppy from her. I don't think there is a pedigree in the United States that doesn't have Clara on it. We got another one from the same breeder. She produced a very nice bunch of puppies. She produced the famous Ch. Pike's Harpo J. Andrew that went Best in Show seven times, he won Best of Breed 81 out of 84 times, and 80 percent of his Group placements are Firsts and Seconds. He took the Canadian Expo in the Veterans class.

Was he your biggest winner?

Yes. I sold him as a young dog and the owner did marvelously with him. I am very proud of that.

How many litters have you bred?

I couldn't tell you that. I don't breed every time a bitch is in heat, I don't breed when a bitch is only ten months old, and I skip a heat between breedings. I have one bitch that is over three years old that I haven't been able to breed yet. There are a lot of things I have to take into consideration. I don't like winter puppies. It is too hard on me and on the dog. We have wind, rain and it is cold. The kennels and the whelping room are heated. I sleep with the puppies for at least two weeks, so for two weeks I am divorced from my husband. He doesn't like it, of course. It is much easier to have the puppies during the summer time, but when it is too hot, then I must be out there to make sure they stay cool enough. In the winter it is too cold and in the summer it is too hot. I like to have a litter around March or April and then in October. Most people want them for Christmas, but I won't sell them as Christmas presents. There are usually kids involved and a Bernese puppy is not a toy. I am willing to keep a puppy for people if they will wait until all the Christmas holidays are over. Unless they have had Bernese before, I prefer that the people come out and become acquainted with the dogs.

Not all my bitches come into heat every six months. Sometimes it is every eight months. Some years I might have two litters and other years only one litter, so in 26 years, that is however many litters.

Do you know how many champions have been in the litters you've bred?

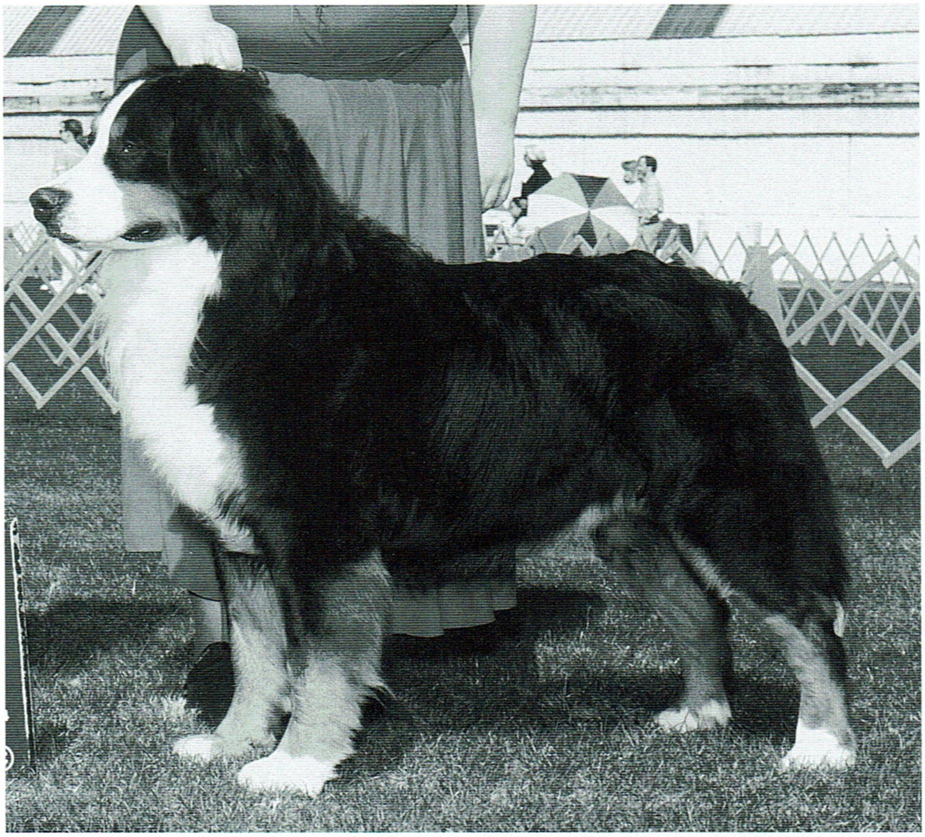
I have the last book that Sharon Smith wrote in New York, and it tells in there. I was quite amazed when I counted them up. I believe there were 72 listed. Those included all the ones I bred and their champion get that carried my kennel name. They are all top producers.

Would you say that, in general, Bernese Mountain Dog pedigrees can be trusted for accuracy?

If it is a sincere breeder, yes. My stock has been imported by us. The people I deal with in Switzerland, and the lady in England, who is a very dear friend of mine since 1974, are people I feel I can trust. She just shipped me a puppy in April. Like every other breed, there are puppy mills and pet store puppies, and I would definitely have the pedigrees of those dogs looked at.

When did you start importing?

I imported all my foundation stock in 1970, and then I kept on going. Every time I needed new blood, I would write or phone and they would send me the pedigree. They also have all my pedigrees.



Pike's Fiddler of the Woof.

How did it come about that you met these people?

I did not meet them. The man's wife I got my first Bernese from is from Switzerland, and they gave me the address and phone numbers of different breeders. The lady in England, who is a Swiss lady, married an English gentleman. She has helped me. She brought her dogs with her from Switzerland to England. The seven-month quarantine is awful. She has kept me quite informed about different bloodlines, so I am very thankful to her. The first one I imported from her, Majanco Languardo, produced 21 champions. He was a very nice dog. The one I got in April is going to his first show this coming Sunday. He is six months old. It is the same bloodline, so I hope he does well, not as a puppy, but later on.

Over the years, how would you say you have used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when should each be used?

I definitely would not inbreed. The first thing the people I am acquainted with overseas told me was, "Do not inbreed!" The other established breeds we had before the Bernese, like Great Pyrenees, have an established line, so you can linebreed. With the Bernese, being a new breed, you really don't have an established line. You have to follow the advice of the people who sell you the breeding stock. I waited eighteen months until they found the right combination to send me as my first stock, and they have done great. To a certain extent, they were linebred on one side, but not doubled up. There is no way I would inbreed a brother and sister. I fight that kind of thing. People have told me I had to inbreed to establish a line, and I say, "No, you don't!" Besides that, every time you breed close, you are reducing your size, and you will get more faults.

Have you used outcrossing?

Yes, and I have had excellent luck.

Do you have any system to how often you outcross?

Once I have a litter planned according to pedigrees, it will be probably at least a 90 percent outcross. If that litter produces something very nice, then I will stick with it. If you once have a mating that has produced well for you, then stick with it.

Who or what would you say has influenced your breeding the most?

Anytime you breed, you want to do

Pike's Armand D'Amour and Can. Ch. Alexi Amore V. Ebnet.

it for the betterment of the breed, and not just to have pups and peddle those. That ideal has influenced me the most. You don't just want to have 25 or 30 pups on hand. That's a factory, to me.

How many dogs do you have now?

I have four, plus the new one, and a male that just finished his Canadian championship. There are also two in Seattle right now to be bred, so that's eight dogs.

What is the most you've ever kept?

We had quite a few Shelties at one point, because people were really into Shetland Sheepdogs for 4-H. They were really popular for a while. Shelties are not really my breed. They are a herding dog and they are moving all the time. I want a dog that is a little more relaxed. All puppies play and are exuberant, even the Bernese. Once they are mature, they are not playful anymore.

Have you named your litters by any sort of a scheme?

I use the alphabet for the dogs I am keeping or those I sell for breeding purposes or for showing. For pets, I put my kennel name in front and they can do whatever they want as far as naming the dogs.

How would you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

Soundness and type are major. As far as temperament, puppies love everything and everybody. Sometimes when a new owner gets a puppy and does not know what to do with it, and doesn't follow the breeder's directions, they can make a wreck out of that pup. There are certain things you don't do with Bernese puppies that you might do with a different breed. Bernese puppies are different. Everyone who has bought a Bernese has said that later on.

How are they different?

They bond at a young age to their new owners, and they want to be with you after that, wherever you go. They want to be part of you, not outside messing around with something else. They are on your feet most of the time. (laughter) This one here, "Trinka," when we eat, she is right by the table with us. She sits down and waits for tidbits, or none. If I put a whole roast on the table, and if the phone rings or somebody drives up and I have to leave for a moment, she won't touch it. I have one out there that is ten months old, and if I brought him in here, there would be nothing left, so Trinka is different.

Is your long-range goal in breeding dogs the betterment of the breed that you spoke of before?

Yes.

How about specific future goals you are striving for?

Oh, I want to retire! (laughter) My husband retired a long time ago. I just can't see myself without a dog. It is in my blood. You have to love animals to stick with it. If you just want to breed for the dollar, don't get into it. There is a lot of joy, but there is also a lot of heartache and a lot of expense. This is not a cheap breed when it comes to upkeep.

What do you tell people about them?

First of all, I tell them what the Bernese breed is all about, and people who are honest and sincere ask that question. I tell them my own experience, but I say, "Don't take this as 100 percent accurate, because this is only my own experience with my own dogs." I might tell them something different than other people would. I can only tell people my own experience. I tell them what they should look for, how they should train a puppy, and to find a veterinarian who knows the breed or who has at least treated some of them. You don't let the puppy do a lot of jumping or climbing up and down steps. You carry the puppy up and down steps. The right food and the right exercise means a lot to a growing puppy. Most people are good. By the time they invest quite a bit of money, they will probably take care of it. There are always others who say, "It didn't turn out like I thought it would, so let's get rid of it." That's not good.

Do you tell people you will take the dogs back if it doesn't work out?

If there is a valid reason. There are a lot of people who would give their eye teeth to have a good Bernese Mountain Dog. I screen people pretty closely before they get one of my puppies. When somebody is coming, the Bernese will jump up and down to let you know. When people come in here, I tell them to sit down and let the dog make its own approach. I watch the people and I watch my dog. When a dog will go over to a person, like Trinka went over to you, that's a person I would deal with. If she goes across the room and lies down behind the table, then I know she is saying, "Mom, you better watch it. That is not the right party." I have tried that several times and it has worked. Maybe she is especially sensitive, but the whole breed is sensitive.

Regarding conformation, how would you interpret the ideal dog of this breed?

First, you must have the type of dog that it was originally bred to be in Switzerland. There are dogs in the United States and Canada that have differing characteristics. It is so amazing to me that people who show my dogs will call and tell me that people come up to them at the shows and say, "That has to be a Pike dog." When the person will ask how they can tell, they will say, "The way the head is shaped and the whole body. It has to be a Pike dog." My dogs have more of the old type head, which is probably a blockier head. The body is shorter. When you keep importing dogs and breeding to true type, you won't get these different variations, like leaner heads, longer bodies and longer legs. The breed is slow to mature and a dog won't be mature until it is three or four years old. If a dog matures fast, it usually falls apart, so I would rather have one that matures more slowly.

You have to know what the dogs in the background of the pedigrees have produced. If you keep breeding blocky to blocky, you will end up with something strange. If you breed only dogs with narrow heads, then the heads will get longer. You can't go only by the looks, you must know the background of the dogs.

What are the most serious faults that you see in the breed today?

It is not a fault, but it is a sad situation with the cancer right now. Nobody knows which dogs will get cancer. It's the same in people. You don't know who will get it next.

Is it a major medical problem in Bernese?

At the moment, yes. There is also torsion and bloat. I watch my dogs very carefully for that. That is something that scares me. If you don't get to a vet within an hour, they are gone. I have lost several dogs to bloat. Sometimes there is trauma afterwards, even with proper treatment. I had an English import that bloated on Christmas Eve and he came through it fine, but he was gone by Christmas morning at 6:00. He was only four and a half. He was a big dog. It was so sad. Hip dysplasia is in

Majanco Languardo, top producer, import from England, with 21 champions.

Beau x Boomer, second litter, March 6, 1991.

the breed, like any other large breed. There can be mild cases of it and you would hardly know the dogs have it.

How would you describe the ideal Bernese temperament?

Different people have different ideas about temperament. I like the old Swiss standard that says they are reserved toward strangers. I like that temperament. If a dog is going to show everybody into my home, and show them all the silver and jewelry, I wouldn't have it. They are territorial and will let you know if somebody comes. They are protective toward their master and the family, but they are not an attack dog. Trinka will jump up and down when people come, and I tell her it is okay. When she goes to a person and puts her paw on them, then they know she accepts them. Some males will get more ruffled up than the girls, especially those that have been used at stud. When someone drives in, they think it is business. One female I have is very alpha and she thinks she is it. She takes care of things. When she is in with the other dogs, she is right on top of them, saying, "Now, don't you move! I'm alpha here." So girls can be more aggressive, too.

If you were to rate the dog on a point scale of 100, how many points would you give to the head?

Probably around 70 points, but that's just my own idea.

Has it been your experience that coat is very important to winning in the ring?

No. We have won with dogs that were clear out of coat and had a stick tail. You will see that with females that have had puppies, lost coat, and gone back into the ring to finish. They look like Labradors, but if they have the conformation and the gait, the coat doesn't seem to matter to most judges.

How should a Bernese Mountain Dog move?

To me, a Bernese is a working dog and a draft dog, mainly. They should move so they can pull a load, not fly around the ring like a racing hound. I have seen many Bernese that just fly around the ring. Naturally, they must have a good gait, but they don't just go sailing out there. Their main power is in the front, because they are draft dogs, so they have to have a sturdy front with a harness on. You couldn't have a dog flying along with a cart behind him! (laughter)

Should there be disqualifications?

There are two now. Blue eyes are a disqualification and any ground color other than black.

Should champions be specialed?

When my daughter finished a champion, she would bring it home, take off its collar and say, "There it is. It's all finished." She would pat the dog and say, "Enjoy your life." Dragging a dog all over the country is no life. I don't see it that way. I didn't own "Harpo" when he did all his winning. I'd sold him to James Smalley. He was madly in love with the dog, and it was his dog so he did all that. He was my homebred dog, though. It is nice if you have the money to take a dog all over, I suppose, or hire handlers to do it. When my daughter was showing dogs, we did not use handlers. They were all owner-handled, which was nice, because a dog per-forms much better for its owner.

Is your daughter still showing for you?

Right at the moment, no. She hasn't got a dog. Her last one died last fall.

Are any of your dogs currently being shown?

Yes, they are. One is going Sunday, and another one just finished his Canadian championship and will be shown in the States now. These people who showed him live up close to Canada, so it is more convenient for them to go across the border. The dog's sister lacks one point of being a Canadian champion, also. The other one that my friend in Seattle has is my dog, too. He has three majors and a few points, and if he wins this Sunday, he will be finished.

Is most judging fair?

Sometimes I can't figure out what some of the judges are looking for. One day a judge looks for something and the next day it is completely reversed. Sometimes there is no consistency. Maybe some judges don't know the breed, or they are looking for one certain thing.

Is there anything that can improve that situation?

Various things have been tried, like having seminars for judges and trying to get them involved, and there are brochures and books available for learning. Most of the old-time judges are pretty good, but some of the newer ones I just don't know about. There may be some lady handlers in the ring who have more appeal than their dogs. Who knows? (laughter)

Would you rather show under a breeder-judge or an all breed judge?

I would show under an all-around, good working judge for the working breeds. The breeder-judge usually knows his/her own line. That's human nature. If I were to be judging and three dogs from my line came into the ring, I couldn't help but choose them, because they are the dogs I like best. A breeder-judge has to be biased.

How popular would you say the Bernese Mountain Dogs are?

They are too popular today. It was much better years ago when we first started. Popularity has really increased in the last ten or twelve years or so. They are expensive dogs, and people think they will make a lot of money breeding them, so they get into it. I have to keep a record of all my expenses and gains for income tax purposes. If my dogs end up by supporting themselves, their food and the vet bills, that's fine, but they certainly don't support us. It's a hobby, but there are people who say, "I have two females and a male, and I'm going to make $30,000." I should take lessons from them.

When I sell my dogs to someone who honestly and sincerely wants to get into it, and they need help, I am always there for anybody. I tell people they can call me day or night, and I don't know how many litters I have whelped, over the phone, during the night for somebody else, clear in the East at 2:00 in the morning. I will help anybody. I want these dogs to be in the right hands and to have what is right done for them. Some breeders don't tell people who buy puppies from them how to take care of them, how to breed them or how to whelp them. I don't know why any breeder wouldn't give the information, but they are the ones who are in it for the money, and not for the safety and health of the dogs. I get phone calls all day long every day of the week from people who are asking questions. People will tell me, "I talked to other people, and they didn't tell me that." I just tell people what my own experience has been.

How do you train puppies and at what age?

At my age, I am not out there with them as much as I used to be. After the puppies have had all their shots, they are heavily socialized. They come into the house and get into things, tear things up and make a mess. Once they have done that and are used to the house, then we take them in the car to get them used to a car. Once they know a car is okay, they love to go for a ride. We will take them to the vet. My vet just loves the puppies. He raises Malamutes, so he is a dog person, too. When they are a little older, I have friends who will take them to the beach to run around for a while. They stay pretty much on level ground. I don't want them climbing up on things, or getting up where they can't get down again.

Do you ever attend fun matches or training classes?

No, not training classes. I can barely get around now, but most people go to fun matches and training classes.

Are fun matches helpful?

Yes, very helpful, if you keep in mind that what the judge decides is not the important thing. The main thing to focus on is socializing your dog by getting out in the crowd with other dogs. You want the ring experience.

Do any of your dogs have any work experience?

Some of them have CDs. My daughter's dog had his CD when he was twelve months old. My daughter was

Baxter at four months in his first snow.

Alexi, Armand and Blair.

born into the dogs, so she has done everything with them.

Have you ever hooked your dogs up to a cart?

Yes. I think I have a picture of Cluney pulling a wagon with some kids in the back. She was a natural. When we hooked her up to that, she said, "Let's go!" There is a couple in Bellingham who have my dogs, and they have trained both of them to carry packs. He is a biologist, and I think he works for the Wildlife Conservation District. Once in a while he has to go out and take water samples and he has all these little bottles in the dog's pack. It's really cute.

I saw some sheep outside and wondered if your dogs were using any herding instincts.

Running up and down the fence. That's about it. They don't really pay much attention to the sheep.

Is it appropriate to take a dog anywhere off-leash?

No. First of all, it is not fair to other people when a big dog is off-leash. Secondly, if you have a lot of money invested in an animal, it only takes a second for something tragic to happen and you have a dead dog. Then, too, if a dog is off-leash and runs up and bites somebody, you are in for a very rude awakening that could be very costly.

Can shy or aggressive dogs be corrected by training?

Yes, although I have never called a Bernese shy. The old standard says "reserved toward strangers." There is a difference. A shy dog is one that cringes and hides in a corner. That really can't be corrected very easily. This one here will watch an occasion, and if everything is okay, she will come out and make friends, but they will never run up to a person, jump up and lick the person in the face.

Have you ever had an aggressive Bernese?

None of my dogs have ever lunged at anyone or bitten anyone. One bit me, but it was my fault. I have phones in three different buildings. When one rings, sometimes I have to get there in a hurry. Once, while I was running to catch a phone, one of my females bit me in the rear and I had a black and blue mark for quite a while. She knew right away that she had done wrong. She looked at me with her tail between her legs and bowed low, saying, "I'm sorry!" That wasn't really aggressive biting.

How intelligent is the Bernese compared with other breeds?

Very. They have you figured out before you start to think. (laughter) No kidding. They can read you.

Are your breedings natural or controlled?

I help throughout the entire mating, because they are large dogs, and I don't want either the dog or bitch to be hurt, especially with a maiden female. If both male and female have never been bred before, you have a job cut out for yourself.

Does that take two people?

Or more. (laughter) It's not easy. Once they are broken in and know what it is all about, they breed by themselves pretty much, but I still stand by because I don't want them to get hurt, and that can happen.

What's a fair stud fee?

I don't think there is any such thing as a fair stud fee! If you sell a choice puppy from your place, it should be equal to a stud fee, but if I sell a puppy for $1,000, I would never have the nerve to charge $1,000 for a stud fee, no matter how good the stud is. That's ridiculous. I would say about $850. There are other people who don't see it that way.

Should the stud fee vary according to whether a dog is proven or not?

Yes, definitely, if he is a champion that has produced well, like the one that produced 21 champions for me. I have been called selfish for not allowing some bitches to use my stud, but that's okay. When I import a dog, it's my dog that I have brought into this country for my own purposes. I don't believe in letting somebody else breed it whose line doesn't fit, or if the quality isn't there. I don't hesitate to say, "I'm sorry. It just doesn't fit." I'm not out for stud fees. I want the male to keep his reputation for what he has already done for me. I don't want him to be bad-mouthed all over the place: "Oh, look what he produced!" I don't see it that way. I'm not that money hungry. I only want to see good animals coming out, not because his stud fee is $850.

Would you breed a dog with a serious fault if he were outstanding in other areas?

I definitely would not breed to a dog with blue eyes, which should not even be sold for breeding purposes, but should be spayed or neutered. I have had people tell me they bought a dog with a blue eye, and they were told, "You can't show it, because it is a disqualification, but you can breed it." That is absolutely wrong! What is good for show is good for breeding. A blue eye should be completely off anybody's breeding list. I would not breed to a dog with entropion or ectropion. I would not breed to a dog that was severely dysplastic. I had a dog that was hit and its hip popped out and had to be pinned for two or three weeks. You won't get a hip clearance in that case. She was a very nice bitch, and just because she couldn't get a hip clearance on that one hip, should I just discard her when it was not a genetic fault? However, I definitely look for the OFA number or the GDC, or whatever it is.

How many litters should a bitch have?

I won't breed a bitch under two years, and the very latest I would breed her would be seven. From two to seven there isn't much time, and even less if you skip once in between litters. I know some people whose bitches have had four C-sections. Thank heavens, the veterinarian has said, "This is it! I won't do any more." You can't keep that up. That's not fair to the bitch. I had a bitch that had five or six puppies, and then we had to go in and get the last one because it was crossways. I feel so sorry for that animal. First, she had to go through all the hard labor of having the puppies, and then she had to be knocked out, opened up and the last puppy taken out. That's such an experience. It's not easy, and it usually happens during the night. They don't ask what time it is. (laughter)

Do you help your bitches whelp?

Oh, yes. The first sign they give that they are going to be having a pup in five hours, I'm with them.

How much do you have to help?

I will help if there is one stuck and I can feel it. I will help pull it out with the contractions. I always have medication on hand, but sometimes it doesn't work. Then I have to call the vet. I have a nice friend who has been in Newfies for a while and she is quite knowledgeable. She comes and helps, and between the two of us, we usually manage to get a stuck one out. The puppy may be dead, but it is better doing it that way than going through a C-section for a dead puppy.

Do you supplement-feed very young puppies with a bottle or tube?

If it is a very large litter, yes. As a rule, if a healthy mother has seven puppies, she can feed them, providing she is well fed and taken care of herself.

What would you feed as a supplement?

There are different things on the market. When I had goats, I used goat's milk, which is good. There are many different things now that do quite well. I have saved several puppies.

Teuer Kalviote at seven months.

Ch. Pike's Harpo J. Andrew,
representing the ideal Bernese Mountain Dog for the Kennel Review.

Do you wean the puppies yourself or let the bitch do it?

I usually prefer to let the bitch do it. I'm old-fashioned and believe in letting nature take care of itself. The puppies learn so much from the mother. There are people who wean puppies at five weeks and sell them. Never! I don't agree with that at all.

When should puppies go to their new homes?

Nine, ten or eleven weeks, somewhere in there.

At what age do you evaluate the puppies for pet and show quality, and what are you looking for?

When they are first born, you can tell which ones are mismarked. The markings are there and if they are badly mismarked, they will never change. If they have a ring-around-the-collar, that is definitely pet quality. The next thing you can tell after they open their eyes, is if any have blue eyes. That would be pet quality. If the head is okay and the markings are okay, then I watch them when they gait up and down the aisle. I want to see how square they are, how wide in front and how wide in rear. I want to see how they stack up on the table. I just keep watching them. It takes a lot of time.

Can you tell pretty well how they will turn out by the time they are nine, ten or eleven weeks old?

Not so I can say one is definitely going to be a winner. I class my puppies by mismarks, blue eyes, and so forth, as I said. Those that are according to the standard are show prospects. Show quality, to me, is an animal that has been in the ring and has already won. Some mature slowly, but if one is shown at six months and has developed everything according to age and wins, you can pretty well say, "This dog is going to go places." Puppies at eight, nine, ten or eleven weeks are show prospects, not show quality.

What should a potential show puppy sell for?

Mine sell for $850 and up. If someone wants pick of the litter, that person freezes all the good puppies in the litter. They have to come out and pick their own, and I've had several people do that. They want the best to raise, show and breed. In that case, the price is high, but the people don't care. They want to pick their own puppy.

Do you ever sell on terms, or is it for cash only?

Since I have been in this for so long, there are people who are waiting for my puppies, and they usually have cash. Pet quality is much lower in price. When people call me up and ask what I have available, I will say, "There are two being bred now. With good luck, if they don't goof it up, we'll have puppies in two months. If you are still interested then, call me back." When the litter is born, I tell the people if they are serious, they can put a third down and keep paying, or pay the rest when they pick up the puppy.

Do you sell your pet puppies with spay and neuter agreements?

Absolutely. There is no other way. I have always done that.

Do you ever get puppies back when you sell a bitch?

No. That's another thing I don't believe in. I have had several calls in the last six or seven months from people asking if I attached co-ownerships to my puppies. When I tell them I don't, they have said, "Oh, good. Then we'll talk business." There have been several who have called asking that recently, and it has me wondering what is going on. I would never myself buy an animal with strings attached. It isn't fair to the person buying the dog and doesn't make any sense to me. Like I said, I'm old-fashioned. When someone buys a breedable bitch from me, I will tell people, "When she has been OFA cleared and is ready to be bred, contact me. If I don't have the stud she should be bred to, then I can tell you which dog to take her to. I will lead you in the right direction so you will have a good mating and good puppies, hopefully, but don't use just anything down the road." Most people have been very nice about it. Once people go through the experience of one litter with all its problems, they are not in such a big hurry to do it again. (laughter)

Co-ownerships are not my ticket. First of all, I don't have that many dogs that I make a business out of it. Maybe people who make a business out of it see it differently, I don't know. The only co-owned male I have is one that hopefully finishes this Sunday. I did that for only one reason. The lady who has him can show him and has the papers. That's the only one I have ever done, and this lady is just like my daughter. She is part of the family and a lovely person. She was over to Switzerland to the World Show in July and she had quite an experience there.

Why haven't you gone yet?

I was born and raised in Germany and I have seen Europe. My family who were there are all dead and gone. I have never really had any interest in going back there. I have been in this country for almost 48 years.

What was the saying you were telling me about before we started recording?

Oh, yes. Every Bernese needs a home, but not every home needs a Bernese. That is very true. I have gone by that for all these years and it works out nicely. There are some people I would not sell a dog to if I had to keep the whole litter.

What kind of homes or what kind of people are a good match for a Bernese?

A family-type home that cares about animals, that will teach the kids what to do and what not to do, like not pulling tails and poking eyes and that kind of thing. Bernese are wonderful kids' dogs. Usually, one parent is home. The Bernese needs that, to feel it is wanted and a part of the family. That's the best way to put it, that they are part of the family.

Do you prefer to sell to people who are looking for pets, or to show homes?

I have found that the family-type home, where the dogs are loved as family members, is better for the dogs than a strictly show home or where the dogs are used as status symbols – "I own a Bernese!"

Do you often find that attitude in people who come looking for dogs?

Thank heavens, not too much, but there are some. They get weeded out pretty quick.

What do you feed your dogs?

Right at the moment, I am on Precise, a fairly new product with no preservatives in it. We have been quite pleased with it. I've used different kinds, but preservatives upset me a little bit. They may not have any connection with cancer, but you keep wondering. So I switched over to this and it looks pretty good.

Do you give any kind of vitamin or mineral supplements in addition to the food?

To growing puppies, yes. I give vitamins and vitamin C definitely. Vitamin C is good for the whole skeletal structure. There is no harm done, it is water soluble, so what the dogs don't need is flushed out. I will feed my females a higher protein and calcium during pregnancy and whelping.

How much grooming do you do for your dogs on a regular basis, and how much to prepare for a show?

Not much. They don't need very much grooming, and I prefer to show the dogs with natural coats, and not this business of blow drying them backwards and up. I don't know where that started.

How often do you bathe them?

This dog here hasn't had a bath since before Christmas, but she is in the house. They are very clean animals. The white on them is what you call a self-cleaning white. They can go out in the mud in the winter time, when there is not so much snow, but mud, and they can play and roll in it and as soon as it dries, it all flakes off. The females will get baths before they have puppies and when they are dropping coat.

Do you do any scissoring?

Only what is necessary, like between the pads of the feet, by the hocks and behind the ears so they look nice. Otherwise, I don't scissor my dogs.

Do you have any favorite grooming products or tools that you use?

I like the Universal slicker brush. That's pretty nice. It goes right down to the skin and takes out all the dead coat, the dirt and grass. That's my favorite brush.

How much exercise do the dogs get?

They are out in great big pens, so they get plenty of exercise here.

Will you describe what your facility is like?

We have a very large, fenced area for them. It is more than most people have available for their dogs. There are big pens where they have free run. It is all a grassy area that is kept cut. There are seven pens.

Do you keep males and females in together?

Not really, and I never put young puppies and adults together. I don't like to run males with females. I keep some of the females together, and I change them around so they have different environments at times and don't get bored with one pen all the time.

What advice would you give to breeders who are just starting out?

If you have found a breeder you can trust and want to work with, and the breeder wants to work with you, stick with that person. Don't run around to different people for different opinions and completely different stories. Listen to what an experienced breeder has to tell you and the knowledge they have gained from their own breeding. That usually takes more than having one litter. You can't learn a lot from novices. By all means, get a pedigree and study it. If you don't know how to interpret a pedigree, find someone who can. You want to know what kind of breeding has been done, how much inbreeding has been done, and what has been produced in the background. The buyer needs to ask the breeder lots of questions. If the breeder can't answer the questions, then maybe you should talk to a different breeder. That's usually some of the older ones who have been in the breed for longer. That doesn't mean that someone who has just started out with their first litter doesn't have good dogs, but experience means a lot.

Would you recommend the new person join a local breed club, the national club and an all breed club?

It depends where the person lives. I live out in the sticks, where it takes three or four hours to go to Seattle to the nearest club, and I'm on the road from 6:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, so I can't do that. The clubs usually require that you attend at least one meeting every so many months. There is a local kennel club here and once in a while I will attend their meetings. I have belonged to the national club since 1970 or thereabouts.

Does the national club do enough to educate judges and new members?

Yes.

Have you ever seen the AKC video on the Bernese Mountain Dog?

Yes. It is like any video. It has some good points and some not so good.

Is there adequate literature available on the breed?

Yes, especially now since we have the two new books out, which are very helpful and very nice books. One is *The Beautiful Bernese Mountain Dogs* by Russ and Rogers in 1993, and *The New Bernese Mountain Dog* by Sharon C. Smith, a brand new 1995 book.

Are your dogs mentioned in either book?

In both of them. I received the books with the compliments and autographs of the authors.

How do you feel about having your dogs in the books?

Well, kind of good! (laughter) Maybe I have done something right.

Will you give us a brief biography of your life?

I was born in 1920 in Germany and

lived with my grandparents. My mother died when I was four weeks old. I had six years of English in school and four years of French. Then I went to business college. I wanted to be a veterinarian all my life. My Dad said, "No. You can choose anything you like, but don't ever come with that veterinarian stuff." That was something that had not been heard of at that time, a female veterinarian. No way. I had to give up that idea, and I went to business college. I became a secretary. When the war broke out, I was working at a government experiment station for animals. There was a 78,000 acre farm where we had all kinds of animals, but no dogs. I just had my own dog, a hunting dog that adopted me. I have always loved animals. The farm raised all its own food and did experimental feeding of cows and horses and so forth. It was quite interesting. I did the secretarial work and all the book work. I was there from 1939 until 1945. We had to leave during the war because the Russians were coming in and I did not want to stay there and be occupied by the troops. I left and went to the southern part of Germany.

Because I knew English, I got a job in a hospital occupied by the Americans. It was a big hospital, with facilities for 1,000 patients, and I worked for Joe, who was working in the mail room. This was in Bavaria. I lived right in back of the Richard Wagner festival house. Joe was my boyfriend then, and he was shipped back home with all the other occupation troops. He asked me if I would consider coming to the States. I said, "No," but we corresponded. In a letter I told him I had changed my mind and might be interested in going to America. The paperwork took a long time. I was on the last plane where war brides were shipped to the United States. That was in December of 1947. The next plane that arrived had to be turned back because the quota was full, so we were the last ones.

So the only way you could come is if you were married?

I had to be sponsored, yes. I had to be married within three or six months, whatever it was. We were married the 3rd of January, 1948. I've been in Sequim ever since.

Was your husband from this area?

No. He was born and raised in Texas, but he had relatives here, and he had bought this place by the time I arrived in this country. The part of Germany I was raised in is all Russian and Polish now, and I really have nothing to go back to, so I've never been back.

Pike's Ch. Zorba O'Languardo, August 1994.

Was it a tough adjustment to come to this country?

No, because I had learned English in school and then worked for the American hospital. It was different here, naturally, but I found it pretty easy to adjust.

And you have one daughter?

Yes. My husband and I have one daughter, and he has two girls from a previous marriage. They were here yesterday visiting. Joe and I together have only one daughter. That's my show girl. She is our baby at 39.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

I've gone to the dogs! (laughter) I am a home body and don't like to travel very much. I enjoy it here where we live. I meet a lot of nice people. What thrills me the most is the people I sold dogs to many years ago have all come back, wanting another dog from me. I have friends in Salt Lake who always send me Christmas gifts and Mother's Day gifts, and they come to visit. I appreciate that very much.

Are there any drawbacks to being in dogs?

I am tied down, but I'm not one who wants to travel a lot or be active in clubs and things like that. I had to raise Joe's two girls and our own, so we kept busy. We had 60 acres to start with here and that kept us busy. Now it is down to 20 acres and that is more than we can handle. We have sheep, rabbits and a few chickens.

What kind of work is your husband retired from?

He did water well drilling. He is not in the best of health. He has had eleven major surgeries, including two bypass surgeries. A year ago, he had a cornea transplant. He has been a favorite of the doctors around here! (laughter)

It is a good thing you have hospital experience.

The most experience I have is as a secretary and interpreter, but my daughter is a medical technologist. We get advice from her.

Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to discuss?

I had a very dear friend, who died a

long time ago, but she had Brussels Griffons, those little guys. I inherited a trophy from her. She was a very lovely lady, and a big inspiration. She taught me a lot about breeding dogs. I owe some of the knowledge I have to her. She was lovely. Her name was Florence Gallagher. She lived in Florida, but she visited me here quite often. She was always there for me and always gave me advice.

I get the impression that you are that way now with a lot of people.

Yes, that's true. I give advice if anybody wants my advice, and I help where I can, no matter if it is a Bernese or another breed where people need advice or help whelping. I can only talk from my own experience and not from what somebody down the road has said.

You have been involved for a long time. Have you noticed changes in dog shows over the years?

Yes.

For better or for worse?

The more popular a breed becomes, the bigger it gets, the more people, the more know-it-alls you get. When we started out and my daughter was in the ring, it was more like one big family. People were very friendly. Now it is more political. It was then, too, to a certain extent, but it is more that way now, with lots bigger crowds. It's different. Marlene liked showing, and it is better to have your children involved in something like that than having them out on the street. We are very fortunate. Marlene has never smoked, drank alcohol or been involved with drugs to this day. That's great.

How do you think your life might have been different without the dogs?

I can't imagine being without dogs. The oldest picture I had, which has been lost, unfortunately, was of me when I was four years old. I was in a little wagon with a goat and a German Shepherd puppy. I was sound asleep and my family was looking all over for me and couldn't find me. There I was, in that little wagon with those two animals. I was raised on goat's milk and had the pup, but I've never owned a German Shepherd in this country.

Do you have any other animals besides the dogs here?

Besides the sheep and chickens, every farm has some cats. Ours are doing a great job of keeping the mouse population down.

In the summertime, especially, we get people coming here from practically all over the United States. They have either seen my ads or they have known someone who had one of my dogs or seen some at the shows. They say, "Since we are in the Northwest, we had to stop." There are a lot of people who come here. It is nice. Sometimes it doesn't quite fit into what we are doing, like when we are whelping puppies, but it is nice. I like company. I like people to come and see my dogs, and my boxes full of pictures.

Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview.

You are very welcome. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Dr. Mary Dawson
HEXLIHEIM
Valencia, Pennsylvania

This interview was conducted at the home of Dr. Mary Dawson in July of 1995 by Lindy Patrick.

How did you acquire your first dog?

It was a long process, because when I first became interested in them it was very hard to find any in the United States at all. My attraction to the breed actually goes back to my college days when I had the 1948 edition of the AKC dog book. There was a picture in there of this beautiful dog called a Bernese Mountain Dog. I'd never seen one like it. I thought it looked like a very interesting dog. When I was a child, I had different breeds, but I figured I shouldn't have a dog until after I got out of graduate school because I would be so busy.

At that point, I did some traveling. I had a postdoctoral position in Switzerland. That was when I saw my first Bernese Mountain Dog, in 1957. I saw this magnificent creature being walked in a park near Basel in northern Switzerland. In the meantime, I had a friend in England who had a Sheltie puppy and I got that puppy. When I came back to this country, I wrote to the American Kennel Club about where there might be Bernese Mountain Dogs. They sent me the name of one man who had Bernese Mountain Dogs, a doctor in Louisiana. I wrote to him and he had one male. That was the extent of it, so that was it for me for a long time.

Then I was back in Switzerland in 1966. At that point, I contacted the Swiss club and went to see a number of different dogs and arranged to get a puppy. That was my first Bernese Mountain Dog. I met the parents of my prospective puppy and liked them very much. The sire was the great York v. Flühwald, who was an absolutely magnificent creature. On seeing the parents, I decided that was the line I wanted to go to. I arranged to have a puppy sent here and he arrived in this country in early 1967.

Did you show that puppy?

Yes, I did. We took him to one show here in Pittsburgh. Of course, he was the only one there and won everything, and went on to Group, but nobody knew what he was in the Group, so that was it. It was our first experience with showing and it was fun.

How did you start breeding them?

I was back in Switzerland in 1968 and at that point I went to another breeder and arranged to get two dogs, a male and a female. I also got another male that was closely related to York v. Flühwald, because I really liked that line a lot. I got him through the person that I got my first one from. My first five dogs were Swiss imports. I bred that female to one of my own males and to an American-bred dog, Hannibal, one of the old-timers. We only got one puppy from that, so that didn't go very far. I also bred to Maximilian v. Nesselacker, another Swiss import. Around 1973, I imported another female, Zyta v. Nesselacker. It takes a long time to come to know and understand a breed and know what they should be and try to develop something. I certainly am not a big-time breeder. I've had them for almost 30 years, and I'm only on the N litter, so that's only the fourteenth litter, and several of those have been litters of one puppy.

What were you wanting to do with your breeding program?

You develop an understanding of what the dogs should be, and you try to maintain that. Sometimes you are experimenting. For example, when we went out to Hannibal, that was a real outcross. For the most part, I have done outcrosses. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't work. When you are doing outcrosses like that, sometimes it clicks extremely well and sometimes it doesn't.

Why did you opt for outcrossing as opposed to linebreeding?

I followed the practice they used in Switzerland. I figured they knew more about it than we did. They almost always outcrossed at that time. They are doing a little bit tighter linebreeding now, but no inbreeding. I know enough about genetics to know that inbreeding is not, for the most part, a good idea. With outcrossing, you get more vigor from different lines, and you are not doubling up on the things that can be real problems. I'm certainly not a big breeder, because that is not my philosophy of what dogs are for. I have them because they are my friends, and yet I try to have good ones, or recognize the good qualities, and if they do have good qualities, then I breed a few litters. It is not my philosophy that dogs are to be an item of commerce, so that makes me selective.

How many champions have you bred?

Out of those thirteen litters, I've had eight champions. This dog here is almost four and he's never been shown. I will start showing him one of these days. I think dogs should have a life and I don't believe the life of a show dog is a life for a dog. Sometimes it is all right to start showing a dog young, but these dogs don't reach their full magnificence until they are adults, which for a male is about three years old. That's when they start to show what they are really like. I don't particularly like to show them when they are still gangly teenagers. That's why I wait.

Can you pick one litter as your best litter?

The first litter was a very good one. We had some really nice puppies in it. Most of them did not go to show homes. We had some bad luck. It was a heat wave in June of the year after they were born and several of them died in the heat wave. It was a combination of circumstances that involved a car accident in one case. In another case there was a miscalculation on the part of the owner whose dog didn't get into a cooler area soon enough. We lost three, but it was a very nice litter. The mother was Ch. Fina v. Nesselacker and the father was Ch. Hektor v. Nesselacker. Although they were from the same kennel in Switzerland, they were not closely related. Ch. Zyta v. Nesselacker had a very nice litter, which was a foundation for a line that is still continuing in New England. The main person who has carried that line forward is Debbie Mulvey. A couple of recent litters have been good. We've produced some very nice puppies from my breeding females Imme and Ingrid, both daughters of Kati (Piper) v. Sturmbuhl. None of them have gone to show homes, so it is my evaluation rather than show evaluation.

Two six-week-old litters at Hexliheim.

Which dog has been the best dog you have ever owned?

When I'm not with the dog I love, I love the one I'm with. (laughter) They've had different strengths. I've had several really strong females. My original Fina was very strong, and Zyta, a National Specialty winner, was a real knockout. You couldn't fault Zyta. She was terrific. I have a female now named Imme who is one of the best moving Bernese Mountain Dogs that you can see anywhere. She got that from her mother, Piper, who was also an excellent example. She was a big, strong female with a far reaching gait. Too many Bernese Mountain Dogs move like they are walking on eggs. Piper would reach out just like a dog would have to when going after cattle. I don't think I can pick any one dog as being the star, because there have been a number of them. A male that I had, Aldo vom Kleinholz, another Swiss import, was a wonderful dog in personality, head and type. He was the sire of an excellent litter that included one called Arthos, who belonged to Sharon Smith, and who went on to being a Group winner and Best in Show winner. Aldo contributed a lot to the breed through Arthos and also through his other son, Argus, who went to Esther Mueller.

It was interesting looking at the pedigrees of the top winners and top producers this year. For the top winners in conformation and obedience, we provided five-generation pedigrees, and four of those pedigrees had my two males, Hektor v. Nesselacker and Klaus v. Kiesenthal in them. What we did back in the early days is very important to what we have today. I'll have to beg your question. I can't pick a star. Zyta was certainly the one that had the most impact as far as winning a National Specialty is concerned.

Was she your biggest winner so far?

Yes. She was a Group winner and National Specialty winner.

Have you done some obedience work with your dogs?

No. I take them to basic training, but I've never shown any of the Bernese seriously in obedience. Back before we were recognized as a club, we would go great distances in order to get together. A group in New England were having an A match, so we all drove to Cape Cod, where I entered Fina in obedience. People who saw it will never forget it. She wasn't good, but she wasn't bad, until she came to the long down. It may have been Novice we were in. We just went across to the other side of the ring and stood there, and she was down. Then she rolled over on her side and over on her back, and then she started to wiggle. She wiggled herself across the ring, but she didn't get up! (laughter)

I take it that was a DQ?

Whatever. I am sure it was. (laughter) They are funny. Their personalities really come out sometimes. The next one I will do in obedience will be Wacho. I'll probably do carting with him, too. They like it a lot.

Will you tell us about carting?

Carting is an aspect of the Bernese Mountain Dog background that is very interesting. In Switzerland today, and going back to the origin of these dogs, they were used for pulling carts. Today, it is mostly for pulling the milk cans to the cheese factory or dairy. They hitch one or two dogs to a cart and they usually go with a person to take the milk to where it belongs. In this country, since distances are greater and there are not too many Bernese Mountain Dogs that live on dairy farms, it's now a recognized sport. The dogs are required to have a certain amount of basic obedience ability. Then they are hitched to a wagon provided by the owner, so it is their own wagon and harness. They go through a course. They have to go between obstacles and different gates. There is also a weight component. They have to be able to pull a certain weight and go a certain distance, a half-mile, over fairly rough terrain.

Is the handler in the cart?

No. The handler guides the dog. The dogs love it, the people love it, and it is something that more and more Bernese will be doing in the future. There are two degrees. There is the Novice Draft Dog, which is a slightly easier course, and there is Draft Dog. People are going into it and doing very well.

Ch. Zyta v. Nesselacker at 1981 National Specialty, winning Veteran Bitch.

It sounds like fun.

It is fun. Early on, Bernese Mountain Dogs got into tracking. They are better at it than you might think, considering the kind of working dogs they are. They have an innate ability to scent the ground or scent above the ground in the air and follow a track. They are very good. Before we were a club, we had a match here and our obedience judge, Keith Johnston, happened to be a man who was very much into tracking. At that point he had Saint Bernards. Then, Keith was very much into this and he took a few people aside who expressed interest in it and he showed them what to do, so they started. The first person to get a tracking title on his Bernese Mountain Dog was one of those people Keith started in tracking. You never know where these things will lead. It is nice to see people doing things like that with their dogs. Being with your dog is so important.

Obedience is quite popular with Bernese people. There have been UDs, although it is not common. There are some excellent working dogs. They are willing to please. The problem with them is they get a little bit bored. I think they figure if they do it once that's enough. They are not like Shelties that will do it five times for you. That just means when you train them you have to keep the Bernese interested. They are good obedience dogs.

What was your greatest thrill with Zyta as a show dog?

In those days, I always showed my dogs myself until they got their titles. If they showed a lot of promise, I had a friend, Barbara Dismukes, a Golden breeder and an excellent handler, who would special them for me. I managed to finish Zyta, even with my handling, which was funny. I remember one time I was showing her under a judge named Glen Sommers, who was an all breed judge. She took the Breed. When the time came for the picture, I had her standing there casually. The judge went over and put her feet correctly for the picture. (laughter) That was cute. Barbara took Zyta and she did very well. We got Group placings and a Group I. Then we went to the National Specialty, a bench show in Harrisburg. The entry was probably 80 or so, which was extraordinary for those days. Barbara would never let me watch the judging, because she said I distracted the dog, and I probably did. I didn't even watch that win. I was sitting at the bench, not being allowed in the vicinity. Pretty soon, I heard this cheer and people came over and told me what had happened. It was a great win, even though I didn't see it! (laughter)

Facing Page:
Klaus v. Kiesenthal, 1971.

BEST OF
BREED
ASHBEY PHOTO

Ch. Zyta v. Nesselacker winning 1976 National Specialty under Arnold Woolf. She is the only bitch that has won the BMDCA National Specialty so far.

Five years later, when she was Best Veteran at another specialty in Wisconsin, that was incredible. The first day of the specialty was a nice day, but the second day was awful. It was cold, with a mixture of rain and snow outside. We moved inside. Even so, we were all soaked, because you would get terribly wet when you walked outside. It was pretty gloomy. I showed her in the Veterans class and that was a real thrill to me when she took it.

Do you miss the benched shows?

Yes. It's fine to have the other, too, because they are relaxed, but from the point of view of the visitor, the benched show is much more educational. You can talk to people and explain to them about the breed, but you just don't do that at an unbenched show. People don't get an opportunity. The unbenched shows are certainly for the people who are showing, and not for the visitors.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

My own programs. It is what more than who. I have tried to understand what Bernese Mountain Dogs are in their place in origin. I started by visiting Switzerland where they came from, and that's where I got my first dogs. I've gone to a lot of shows in Switzerland, and I've also been to one big show in Austria. By maintaining contacts with people in Switzerland and Germany, I try to understand the background of the breed, which is what the breed is.

My own background is I am a vertebrate paleontologist. I study fossils and extinct animals. Because of my own professional historic interest, I tend to look at the breeds from a historic perspective. Breeds of dogs are what they were developed to be in the past. I regard it as our job to maintain that past, not to change it. If you change it, you don't have that breed. Once the stud books were closed and we were no longer cross-breeding for certain purposes, then that is the purpose. The most important thing in a breed, from my point of view, is what it was intended to do and how you can maintain the qualities a breed was intended to have.

In the case of the Bernese Mountain Dogs, they were all-purpose farm dogs. They were used as watch dogs around the farm, so they should have a certain sense of territory and attention to what is going on. On the other hand, they are not guard dogs. They were never meant to be guard dogs, so they should not be terribly aggressive. They may range from fairly outgoing to somewhat reserved, but never aggressive or shy and never too sharp. That's a hard thing to maintain and you must breed very carefully to maintain that. The character of a dog is probably the most important thing there is. You must live with these dogs. People who have them in kennels don't care. That's not what these dogs were meant to do. They should not be kennel dogs.

All the Bernese Mountain Dogs I've ever met have had beautiful temperaments.

If that's the case, and I think it is, then we're doing a good job. Along with that, you want them to have a certain appearance. They were meant to be very sturdy, fairly heavy dogs able to go long distances, although not at great speeds. They have to have strong feet to work on fairly rocky terrain. These characteristics all made them good farm dogs.

The appearance is something that has been overlaid on their basic structural character, and people began to stabilize the breed's appearance around 1905 when they became interested in that aspect of the breed. Up to that point, dogs were similar, but markings were somewhat varied. You could have a ring around the neck, more white on the legs and the blazes were different, and so forth. The Swiss breeders began stabilizing it about that time to the fairly standardized type of markings we have today. Those markings, although they don't necessary affect how the dog acts or how it works around the farm, contribute to the striking appearance of the dogs.

The black coat, of course, goes back to the watchdog function, which is different from a guard dog. The black dog is more forbidding looking than a light-colored dog, but the other markings are overlaid on top of the black. That's why they are such striking markings. We prefer the symmetry, the white tail tip and all the other markings the dogs have. We prefer rust rather than a pale tan. Those things are matters of preference, but they are what marks the breed. The markings, size and substance are what marks the breed physically. Those things are very important. You don't want a lightweight dog. The heads are pretty impressive, and that, too, goes back to its function as a watchdog, one that you are going to really watch. Deerhounds, for instance, are a long way from looking like a watchdog. They have an elegant, slender head, and you are not afraid of a dog like that, although they are big and fast, but the imposing Bernese head is one thing that goes along with what the dogs are.

Are you breeding Deerhounds, also?

I have only bred once. My female is nine years old now, so she is not breeding anymore. We had a litter of three and I kept one, so my male is her son.

They are lovely dogs.

They are absolutely lovely dogs. I enjoy having both breeds because they are total opposites, but both have nice personalities. Bernese will absolutely pester you for attention, whereas the Deerhounds are quiet, easy and laid-back. I love the Deerhounds very much.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

My first female, Fina v. Nesselacker, was a little devil when she was a puppy. She was so bad! Before I got her, she would get all the other puppies stirred up so they were roughhousing and tumbling and then she would sit and watch. She would start it and then just observe. The other puppies would wear one another out and want to sleep, while she was all fresh because she was just watching. She would get them started up again. She was so bad that the breeder called her, in the Swiss dialect, Hächsli, which means little witch, because she was so bad. I decided that would be a good name, so I put it back into regular German. Hexli means little witch and heim is home, so it is home of the little witch. If you are going to use the Swiss dialect, it would be a little different, but I thought this sounded nice.

How many dogs do you keep now, and what's the most you have ever kept?

What I have now is the most I've ever had and I should not have so many! I have nine dogs altogether. Five are Bernese Mountain Dogs. I have two Deerhounds, an Aussie and a mixed breed dog. When you are just one person, that's a lot of dogs to give all the attention they need. I work full time, and it is more than I should have. I would like to have only three, but a puppy comes along, you know, and I think, "Maybe I'd better keep that one." That's what happens. I have one puppy now. The small puppy here is just visiting for the weekend while her owner is away. She is a little Swiss import. I have one puppy I kept from a litter last fall and a one-and-a-half-year-old male that I kept from a previous litter.

Do you plan to show them?

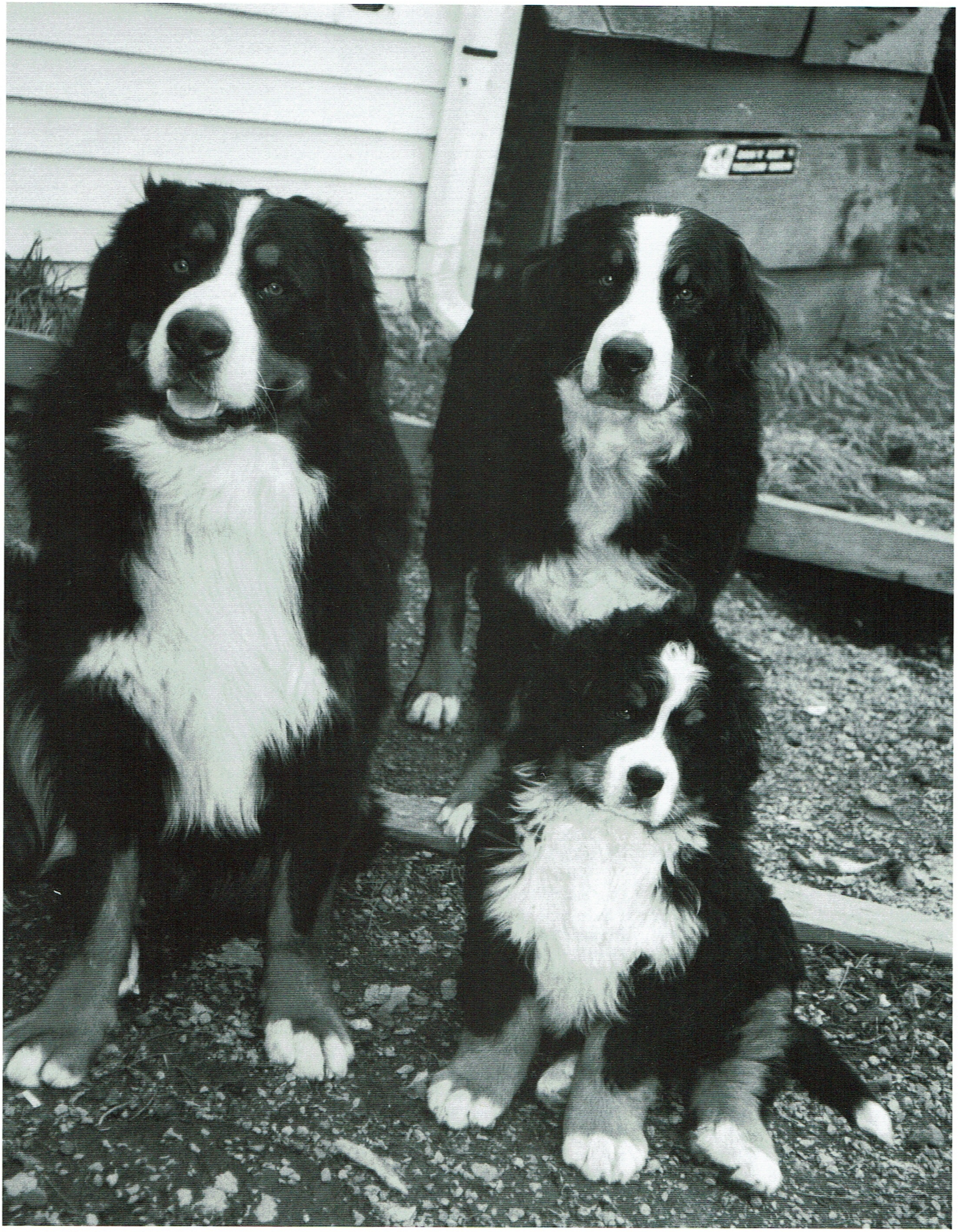
Quite likely. We had a match here in the spring and the little female was Best Puppy in the match, so she has a lot of good qualities. She moves like a dream. She is only eight months old, so she is not fully developed yet. Her head has to fill out, and so forth, and if that happens, then we will show her. If it doesn't happen, she will have a permanent home here.

Do you see discernible differences in the American and European dogs?

Unfortunately, I do. In the years that I have been in the breed, I see differences in the European dogs, too, for the good. Back in the '60s, dogs were not x-rayed, so you would get dysplastic dogs. Today, they are very strict about x-raying. Indeed, they are very strict about breeding. You have to have a passing grade on your dog's hips in order to breed it, and during the past couple of years, elbow clearances are also required. They are taking very good care of that. In Europe, you don't see dogs whose rears you are unsure about, so that has improved there. They have maintained the style and substance they had right along.

What has happened in this country is some people tried to turn the breed into more stylish dogs rather than heavy farm dogs. They were led, in part, by the show ring. Too often, particularly in the Group ring, but to a certain extent in the Breed ring, too, judges who don't know a breed will go for style and flourish, fast movement and that sort of thing. That's not what a Bernese Mountain Dog is, anymore than a Newfy or a Saint Bernard is that way. Some breeders who were more interested in winning than in the history, reputation and heritage of the breed were sacrificing substance for flash and style. Because they are winning, the American dog buyer tends to go to the winner. They think that's the way it is, but it's not. That's not what the dog really is. If you do that, you don't have the breed anymore. I have seen that happen.

Some of us in the national club keep yapping on the fact that there ARE NOT two kinds of Bernese Mountain Dogs. There is only one. Even people who know better will say, "It is a pretty nice American Bernese Mountain Dog," rather than saying it is a nice Bernese Mountain Dog. That's a tendency I deplore and I think we have to keep fighting against. That's why I always harp back to what these dogs are. People see them in dog food advertisements,



Wacho v. Sturmbuhl, his son Klaus v. Hexliheim and Ingrid v. Hexliheim, fall 1993.

and so forth, and they are very striking dogs and have nice personalities. People are attracted to them, but they don't know what they are. It's the role of the club and breeders to know and tell what they are.

Is it difficult to import dogs?

No. It's expensive. Dogs that are recognized by the Swiss or German kennel clubs can be imported easily. It's a little more difficult than an American puppy, because you have to send in photos, but a foreign pedigree will be recognized. If the dogs come from a farm, the USDA may require that you don't allow that dog to leave your property for so many days, but there is no quarantine. They are not detained when they come into the country. They are allowed to go to their destination.

What's happening with the elbows?

There is an apparently inherited condition which they call "elbow dysplasia," but it is actually osteochondritis dissecans. In any mammal, there is a growth plate of cartilage and then there is bone on the end. What happens in this disease is there is a fault in the growth plate so the part on the end does not unite with the rest of the ulna. When that is loose, or if the dog gets bruised, a little piece may break loose and float around in that joint and cause lameness. They think this is an inherited feature, so they are now x-raying elbows as well as hips. Even good orthopedic veterinarians are still unsure of how this characteristic is actually inherited.

So it's not as clear-cut as hips?

Even hips are not that clear-cut. Everybody knows there are environmental factors. With elbows, there are other things that can make a dog lame, like panosteitis, which is sort of like growth pains that they get over in time. Also, a puppy may play too rough or fall and they can become lame that way. You have to be very careful in diagnosing that. Radiographs are difficult to read. That is something we are watching in the breed now. Radiographing elbows is not required in this country, but most people are doing it. It is almost standard now to have the elbows done when you take your dog in to have his hips x-rayed.

In what order of importance would you rate type, temperament and soundness?

Temperament would be first with me, because you have to live with these dogs. That's a constant, and I would rate temperament as being extremely important. Of those three, I would certainly place temperament first, although those three things should not be set up as a trichotomy, because they are all important. Soundness is very important. If your dog is hurting, it is not going to be a happy dog. Soundness, as far as joints, structure and the functioning of all the organs, is extremely important. Without type, you don't have a breed. If you don't have type, you may have a nice pet, but you don't have something you can be proud of as a Bernese Mountain Dog. They are on three different levels, and temperament is the overall umbrella. If you are breeding and selling puppies, you want to be sure they have a good temperament.

You also want to be sure the dog is healthy. A problem in the breed now is longevity. There are some lines that are cancer lines and it is a real problem. It is difficult to conquer and we don't know what the inheritance is, if any. In a few cases, there is strong evidence that it is a strongly inherited component in cancer, but we don't know that for all of it. Environmental factors are so hard to separate. By environment, I don't mean just the physical environment, but the mental environment. We know in people, for example, that stress can be a very important factor in the breakdown of the immune system, and cancer is probably an immune breakdown. Dogs that are subjected to things they shouldn't be subjected to, like maybe a heavy show schedule, can lead to their immunological breakdown. There are a lot of problems connected with keeping dogs in non-natural environments, which is what we provide them.

Have you established a distinguishable line?

I have to be careful on that, because I am such a small-time breeder. Fourteen litters in 30 years is not very many litters. I think my dogs can be distinguished from other lines.

What distinguishes them?

I go very much for size and substance. I like to have a good head. Those things are visible. I have done some Sweepstakes and match judging and people know what I'm after.

So they won't bring you a fine-boned dog?

They can bring it in and I will go over it just as I would any other dog, but it isn't going to do anything. (laughter)

Can you describe your ideal Bernese Mountain Dog?

An ideal Bernese Mountain Dog will be a dog that you look at and think, "Wow! That's impressive." That impressive appearance is a combination of a solid character, one that stands up and says, "I know who I am. Who are you?" Along with the size and quality that makes it something you want to watch move and lie down, and be a beautiful thing to watch, it is beautiful in the sense of having an elegance that is imposing. You say, "Now, there's a dog!" That's what I felt when I first saw a Bernese Mountain Dog. I thought, "My goodness! That is a dog!" I still have that picture in my mind as an ideal to work toward.

Why do some dogs look terrific when they are standing still, but not so good when they start moving?

They are not put together right. That is not rare. A lot of it has to do with the way the front end is assembled. Rear ends are easy. It is very easy to see angulation in the rear and whether they are straight or cowhocked. The structure of the rear, the way the femur comes down and back, is easy to pick out. Front ends are not easy because of the way the upper arm is so close into the body. It is hard to see exactly how the scapula lies without really getting into it with your hands, when you can say, "This is where this is," and "This is where that is." Too often, we are seeing a dog that stands looking wonderful and alert, but if his shoulder is too straight and if he is lacking angulation in front, then when the dog moves it will fall apart. Those are some of the dogs you see that move like they are walking on eggs. They have a choppy gait because they don't have the good muscle structure to have good reach.

Frequently, along with that goes a neck that is too short. That is hard to tell in a dog that is as heavily coated as a Bernese Mountain Dog. You have to be sure it is actually short and that there is not just a lot of coat hiding the neck. Too many of our dogs don't have chests. When you put your hand between the dog's front legs, it just drops off. There is nothing out there to hold the dog's legs apart. That, again, is something that will make them loose and soft in the front end. You don't see that when a dog is standing, because it has a nice big ruff in front and they are just standing, but when they start to move, you can see it. It is a real problem.

Are you looking for a 45-degree layback of shoulder with corresponding layback of upper arm, or a more moder-

ate front?

I can't tell you what degree I am looking for, but when I feel it with my hands, I can tell whether or not a dog is in trouble. I have never measured it. I am looking for enough layback so you can see the legs are not coming right out of the scapula. You have to have that angulation to keep them forward.

What do you want to see in side movement?

What I really look for from the side is good reach in front. The rear will follow, but you need that good reach in front. You don't want them overreaching in back. That's when you get crabbing. That is related to body proportions. This is a breed of dog that should be a little bit longer than it is high, but not a lot. If you get a back that is too long, there is a dip. I'm looking for reach and body length that goes along with limbs. Then you know it will come and go straight. I want a nice level topline. I don't want a steep croup. I want a croup that goes off like a relatively high table. The movement should be moderately smooth. There is not a whole lot of spring in a Bernese Mountain Dog, compared with a Deerhound that has a lot of spring in its side movement. You don't see that much in a Bernese, because it has mass.

What are you looking for in the head?

I am looking for width across the skull and a moderately flat top. I want ears level with the top of the head. If you drop the ears, then you have a houndy appearance. You don't want that. If you look at the skull from the top, it should wedge out. If it comes in too soon, you have a snipey muzzle, and that's not correct. The muzzle should be a width that is in proportion with the backskull. Male heads are different from the female's. I look for that, and if I see a male with a female head, it is not a good male. If I see a female that I can't tell right away is a female, then she is too doggy. You are supposed to be able to tell at a glance whether a dog is a male or female. That is not easy to maintain. Another thing you have to watch is the markings, because they can throw you off in determining head proportions.

What about the importance of eye color?

Eye color is important. I realize it doesn't change the function of the eye, but the darkest eye is best. Several of my dogs have eyes that are not as dark as I would like. According to the standard they are not too light, but I like dark eyes. The puppy that is here now has black eyes and that's ideal. The standard says dark brown.

Is the standard a good one, overall?

It's not bad. It lost a little bit of its vitality when it was worked over. It has been worked over several times in the past ten or fifteen years. I don't think it emphasizes as much as it should the striking, imposing appearance of the dogs. It talks about size and substance, but it may not make them as striking as they really should be, so it is a bit wishy-washy. That's something that has happened to standards; they've been homogenized. The standard uses terms that really don't mean anything. All dog standards say "hocks well let down," and that doesn't mean a thing. A horse standard says the same thing. Those are terms they keep repeating and repeating, but they are rather nonsensical terms. It is hard to know what "moderate" is, and judging is still a subjective game.

Do you enjoy judging?

I enjoy it in that I feel it can contribute to a person's understanding of dogs. I'm not in with any one group. I tend to favor a certain kind of dog and I don't care who has it. One thing that several of us in the club have done is to encourage groups in their matches to judge the dogs on the European style of judging. What that means is each dog is judged against the standard instead of being judged against the other dogs. You have ratings and you can have a class where all the dogs have excellent ratings, and you can have a class where none of the dogs have excellent ratings. There is no comparison, except your comparison to the standard and the ideal dog that you visualize. Along with that, we give a written critique. We give an oral critique so the people ringside know what we are doing, and we give each exhibitor a written critique they can take with them to know why we rated the dog the way we did. It may have wonderful movement, but maybe its markings are off. It is a nice way for people who are learning to understand their dog a little bit better, based on the point of view of one judge.

I knew a young novice couple one time who said the judge's critique made them open their eyes for the first time and learn how to look at their dog.

Yes. The more of that you do, the better. In our local club, we do it. After some of our meetings, we go through points of our standard. We get a dog up front and go over it. It is amazing how many people don't look at a dog and can't tell you what its strong or weak parts are, not even on their own dogs. By giving critiques and being friendly and noncompetitive about it, you can build the feeling that no dog is perfect and the person has a wonderful dog whose only fault may be markings that are off. People who have dogs want that and they can profit by it. There will be ultra-competitive people in any field.

Are missing teeth a problem in the breed?

I judged a bunch of puppies at a specialty last year and it was not a problem. I know it is something we keep an eye on in the breed. I went to a specialty in Canada where my female went Best of Opposite Sex, and the judge commented that there were a lot of missing teeth. That surprised me, because I hadn't seen that much of it. Apparently it is something we really have to keep an eye on.

Is coat very important to winning in the ring?

Coat is certainly one of the crowning glories of the breed. The coat can be either wavy or straight. It should be long and full. It is a double coat. It should be of a very soft texture, and fuller in males than females, especially the ruff in the front. I keep saying "should," because in the show ring, what has happened is people are trimming them. You very seldom see a full ruff. If you look at these dogs from the side, they are absolutely trimmed off to a certain length. That is incorrect. People are scissoring heavily. I did not go to the specialty this year, but I was told the grooming room was full of scissored hair! I was just shocked, even though we have seen this coming for some years. That is not the way it should be. Judges should take the fur into their hands and ask, "Where is this dog's coat?" You can tell a scissored coat from a natural coat, and it simply should not be that way. When I am judging in Sweeps or a match, if I see a coat like that, I say very politely to the exhibitor, "Is this dog out of coat?" If they say, "No, that's the way the coat is," either the dog has been scissored, which is incorrect, or the dog has an incorrect coat. Either way it is wrong! I will definitely penalize it.

It seems to me a lot of breeds go through that. There was a day when Wheatens were scissored like Poodles.

Following Ann Arbor, Michigan KC show, June 1, 1969. From left to right: Sylvia Howison and Wendy, Charlie Howison and Imp, Mary Howison, Harold Howison and Machs Na, Mary Dawson and Klaus, Janet Dawson and Fina, Hektor, and Loy Barker with Barkers Best Black Baroness.

Finally, judges became aware of the fact that they were supposed to be terriers with a fairly rough coat and I think they have stopped it. So often in the Breed ring, they want the dogs to look like Poodles, all manicured and everything. These dogs should be cleaned up around their feet and ears, they should be brushed and that's it!

What about whiskers?

That's optional. I don't cut them, because I believe dogs need their whiskers, but a lot of people cut them to have a neat looking muzzle, and it does make them look neater. The problem is when the whiskers grow back in they look pretty awful.

Do you have any favorite grooming products or tools?

No. Probably the best product you can have for coat is the food the dogs eat.

What do you feed?

I feed a strange combination. I mix some commercial dog foods, ProPlan, Natural Life and Sensible Choice. One is based on turkey, two are based on lamb, which I mix, and I add to it cooked beef or chicken, cottage cheese and they occasionally eat eggs. I will sometimes add a good quality canned dog food. We use canned Iams, which is pretty good. In Ohio they have a dog food called Biljac. We can only get the frozen here. That's wonderful stuff. My dogs love it.

Will you tell us a little more about the temperament of the breed?

This dog here is a real sweetheart. Interestingly enough, the males in the breed are more that way than the females. The males are more devoted than the females. Sometimes when people are wanting to buy a puppy, they choose a female because they think she will be more devoted, but I say, "Not in this breed!" It's the other way.

What is the ideal height for dogs and bitches?

The top of the standard for dogs is 27 1/2, so probably 26 to 27 is a nice size. I like my bitches pretty big, around 24 or 25 inches. The big males can get up to 130 pounds, and the females around 90 to 100 pounds.

What is the ideal foot?

The foot should be compact, not spread. The toes are not too long. The pasterns should be quite steep, and not sloping very much so, ideally, they have tight toes and fairly steep pasterns.

What about tailset and length?

Tails are long. They should be at least to the hock. The set should not be too high. We have a problem with tailsets. A high set will lead to a gay tail, which is something that is inherent in the breed. The related Sennenhund, the Appenzell, actually has a ring tail, so you know way back in the heritage of the breed it was there. We try to maintain a fairly low tailset so they won't ring. When the dogs are up and excited, they can carry their tails high, but they shouldn't ring. That is particularly true with males. They get all excited when they are running around and the tail goes up, but it should drop when they relax and be carried with a swirl.

What are the most serious faults in the breed today?

Lack of substance is a serious fault, which goes along with a lack in head. Heads are too narrow. Bad fronts, with not enough angulation, and movement problems. Those are show problems and movement problems. With movement, the lack of reach and drive is possibly a problem area, and that may be lack of conditioning of the dogs. They just don't get enough exercise. These dogs love to run up and down hills and some dogs probably don't get as much exercise as they should.

How do you condition your dogs?

They get a lot of exercise. I have big runs for them and they go on walks. I don't bicycle them or take them with the car. We have five fenced acres, so they get a lot of exercise. When you have a number of dogs, they are not going to lie around too much.

Are there any disqualifications?

A blue eye is a disqualification, and any color other than black. Also, refusing to stand for examination in the ring is a disqualification, so no shyness is allowed.

Should champions be specialed?

It's a good idea at specialty shows, but specialty shows are judged differently from all breed Groups. If a dog is really top-notch and a really nice example of the breed, then, sure, take it out – within limits. A dog should be a dog, and that's the problem with showing them. I'm not in favor of campaigning for the Top Ten or Twenty. I think it is divisive and false. There are enough politics in the world of dogs that we don't need to add to it by that kind of campaigning. I don't think it is right, but it is a typical American attitude. We are very competitive people. We like to be winners. In something like dogs, we should stand back and look at what we are doing to the dogs, which is the most important consideration, and we should think about what the point is of that kind of competition.

Is judging fair, and what might be done to improve it?

Too many judges have too many breeds, and they don't know them well enough. Once judges have a certain number of breeds, it is easy for them to get more. For example, the Great Swiss Mountain Dogs are recognized now, and I am sure that people who have never seen a Great Swiss Mountain Dog will be approved to judge them. That's nonsense. We need more rigorous tests for people who apply to be judges, and they should specialize more in fewer breeds. The concept of an all-rounder is probably a false concept. It is probably not possible to be an all-rounder, to really know all breeds to a competent degree. I had an interesting talk one time with the woman who was judging when I was stewarding for a Great Dane Sweepstakes. She had been a handler and she really knows Danes. We were talking about judging. She said she didn't want to be a judge. She knew Danes, but she didn't want to judge them. That's a shame, because there was a person who knew Danes, but she didn't want to do it.

Are you interested in getting your judge's license, and why or why not?

Not really. I think that I can contribute by judging matches and Sweeps, where people are usually more interested in learning than in winning. I can also contribute by encouraging other potential judges in a positive way.

Would you rather show under a breeder-judge than an all-rounder?

Yes. It's most apparent at specialty shows where the results are entirely different from a regular AKC show or the Group ring. Many times at our specialties, where we have judges who frequently, but not always, know more about the breed, we see entirely different results from those we see in the Group ring.

Does having a big-name handler help a dog win?

Unfortunately, it does, and it's a shame. The judges should be looking at the individual that has the collar on and that isn't always the case. (laughter)

Does advertising influence judges?

I really don't know. If I have a good dog, I'll show it, and if it finishes, that's great, but I'm not highly competitive about it. Dogs are not a business for me. I've heard through various grapevines that advertising influences judges, but I have no first-hand knowledge. I hope it doesn't. It would be a sad commentary if judges formed their opinions from ads rather than from the standard.

At what age do you start training your puppies, and what do you do with them?

My dogs are raised pretty freely. I had one male here that was over a year old before he had a collar on, but he went on to become a champion. When you take a puppy to the vet for its first shots, that's a good time to put a collar on it. From there, six months is probably a good time to be a little more serious about what you are doing. They should be allowed to be puppies for a while. I start socializing from day one and it goes on from there. I really try to do that, because it is something Bernese Mountain Dogs need. Since they are watchdogs, they could have a tendency to be a little standoffish unless they are socialized.

Have you ever put an obedience title on one of your dogs?

No. I'm waiting. One of these days, I will. They roll on their backs very well. (laughter)

Do you have any specific advice for owners who would like to handle their own dogs?

There are very good dog trainers who are oriented toward the kind of breed that Bernese Mountain Dogs are. They have a certain attitude toward training. Try to choose a trainer who is not highly competitive and who wants each dog to do the best for that particular individual. That kind of a trainer can help you with handling and showing your dog. I would encourage a first-time owner who wants to show to go to shows to see how things work, but they should find somebody who can help them learn how to handle. Then, don't get discouraged when you are faced with professional handlers. A good judge should be able to pick a good dog, no matter who is on the end of the lead.

Is training important to winning in the Breed ring?

Yes, it's important. It is hard to look at a dog that is misbehaving. To a certain extent, I can understand judges who are a little short with dogs that misbehave in the ring. That just shouldn't happen, but I don't think a judge should penalize a dog because it is lively or happy. All dogs should not be automatons in the ring so they don't show any personality. There is nothing more delightful than watching all those tails wagging in a Bernese Mountain Dog ring. If I see a class where that is not happening, I know something is wrong in that ring. Tail-wagging should be allowed, but a dog should be trained to stand, to allow its teeth to be examined and the other things required in the ring.

Are your breedings natural or controlled?

I try for natural breedings if at all possible. That's the most desirable thing. Occasionally, with a maiden bitch, we will have to do an artificial in order to get a breeding. For the most part, the natural breeding is the way to go, however. If a dog cannot breed naturally, do you really want to reproduce that quality? I also believe in natural whelping for the same reasons. You can get into real trouble if you have to have C-sections generation after generation. If that is the case, there is something wrong. There has been a problem of uterine inertia in the breed in some lines. There are people who almost routinely get C-sections, so they don't really know if their bitches are healthy or not. There is no reason why a female Bernese Mountain Dog shouldn't be able to have her puppies. They are not extreme, and don't have head and breathing problems that some breeds have. Bulldogs are a different story, and I can't fault Bulldog people for doing that. Bulldogs are wonderful dogs, and if you want them, that's what you have to do.

What is a fair stud fee?

A dog that is finished, has a title and has shown itself to be of a certain standard should be able to charge more. It costs something to show a dog, money as well as time and effort. There should be a basic stud fee. There is every formula out there under the sun. In my opinion, you should make an agreement what the stud fee is before the bitch comes, and the fee should be paid upon registration of the litter. We are getting into absolutely ridiculous complications. There are breeders who have all kinds of strings attached to the sale of their puppies. Some charge a different fee depending on how many puppies the bitch produces. That doesn't make any difference. The stud dog's action is the same no matter how many puppies the bitch has. That's rather silly, and it can be very expensive if the bitch whelps a large litter.

I also don't believe in some of the agreements breeders make, such as if someone buys a female the breeder gets the first litter and chooses who the bitch is bred to. The problem you get into there is overpopulation, and when you sell a puppy, you don't know if it is going to amount to anything. You are getting into the trap of overproduction, which is a terrible problem in purebred dogs. As to the actual dollar amount of the stud fee, that's up to the breeder, but a stud fee is a stud fee, and why make it something it is not? If you have to do AI because of the bitch, then the owner of the bitch should pay for it, but other than something sensible like that, it should not be complicated.

Wacho v. Sturmbuhl, a German import, at four months.

Have you ever refused to service a bitch, and why?

Yes, I have, if I felt the bitch should not be bred because of quality. That's a hard one, because you know the people will go elsewhere, but you have to make your own standards.

How many litters should a bitch have, and what is the youngest and oldest she should be bred?

You can probably breed a Bernese Mountain Dog bitch around the age of two for the first time. I don't think they should be bred past six years of age. I would not breed a bitch more than once a year, so that would mean a maximum of three or four litters in a lifetime, which is plenty.

Do you help your bitches whelp?

I'm there. Some of them are good and some of them are not good. I have to be there to make sure the cord is tied off and so forth, so I do help.

Do you supplement your very young puppies?

Not unless there is one that is very small. If there is a smaller puppy, I probably get overconcerned and try to give it more by using Esbilac. My experience is that doesn't work very well. They usually hang on. I've never lost one because it wasn't eating enough and the smaller puppies usually catch up. We worry too much about it, but it is probably natural. I've never had a really big litter. The largest litter I've ever had is six, so I can't speak to problems of a litter like twelve, where probably it is a different story.

When do you wean?

Depending on the litter and when they seem ready to eat, I will start them on a little bit of milk when they are pretty small. By about the age of three weeks, I will start them on a little bit of scraped beef. I will buy steak and scrape it. I will mix that with milk so they get a soupy, high protein mush. The next thing is to start soaking the dry dog food in milk and let them get used to that. I don't make a big thing of total separation, but usually by that time the mother has separated herself and is staying away from her puppies. You have to be adaptable, because different litters develop differently and the mother has a different reaction, also. This bitch here is a terrible mother. The first few days are fine, but then she gets bored with them and would rather be off playing. Her sister is a wonderful mother. The last time, fortunately, her sister had five while she had only one, so that was okay. Some people are so precise and rigid about these things.

At what age do you normally start evaluating for pet and show quality, and what are you looking for?

I don't start before six weeks. Then I watch them carefully, because things can happen between six and eight weeks. I know of people who evaluate angulation when the puppies are born, but I don't think you can do that so early. I am looking for body proportions and movement. Markings are easy. You can still be wrong, no matter what you think.

Do most of your puppies go to show homes?

I prefer to sell to pet homes because I think those dogs have better lives. If there are people who are interested in showing, then that's not a problem. I won't sell to a kennel. There are more important things to think about than how much money a person has to spend on a puppy. I would rather have a person put the money into a fence. I require people to have a fence. If the people work, then I have to know that they can take care of a puppy. I select owners depending on how they will take care of the dog, which is the hardest thing in the whole game. Sometimes you may have just a feeling that you should not sell to someone, and you should probably follow that feeling. I've made some mistakes that I regret.

Do you sell on terms?

No. When I sell a puppy, the puppy is sold. When they leave here, if it is a quality dog, I give a full registration with males or females. I expect to be paid when the people get the puppy. I have only one string when I sell a puppy, which is if at any time the person can no longer keep the dog, I have the right of first refusal. I want to be the one who says what happens to that dog next, so that it won't be tossed out or passed on to a kennel or puppy mill. It is really hard to find the right home for a puppy.

When do you like the puppies to go to their new homes?

I would like to see them go at twelve weeks so I have a longer time to look at them. I sell them at eight weeks. A lot of people have the idea that if you don't get them at eight weeks they won't bond, but that's total nonsense! I have sold older puppies and they bond just as well as a younger puppy, but people have this idea. That interpretation is based entirely on studies that were done at Jackson Lab, using Shelties as one breed and I think Beagles were the other, which are very different breeds. Bonding depends upon many things, including weaning and the breed itself. To do a study on those two breeds and then apply it to all other breeds, from big, slow maturing dogs, to smaller, more rapidly maturing dogs, doesn't have any validity at all.

Our Swiss and German breeders will not ship a puppy to America before it is twelve weeks old. Their reason is the puppies are faced with an eight- or ten-hour frightening experience on the plane. The Swiss and German breeders have determined over the years that at least twelve weeks of age is when the puppies are best able to handle that experience. When those puppies come at twelve weeks, they bond just as well as an eight-week-old puppy. I just do not think that study is valid, and it is too bad that it is being spread around so much.

It would depend on a puppy's socialization. I can see that happening to a Beagle who is left in a kennel. It would bond more with other dogs than it would with people.

Yes. What happens with the Shelties, I think, is they got shy because they were not socialized so it seemed that way and they didn't bond with anybody. These artificial experiments are flawed. Heck, you can get an adult dog and have it become your best buddy! (laughter)

Will you describe your kennel setup?

My kennel setup is, ah ... casual. (laughter) Puppies are whelped in the kitchen or living room. It depends on the time of the year and how warm I can keep it. This is an old house and I have to be careful about that. Last fall, for example, I had one litter in the kitchen and one litter in the living room. I have three separate enclosures. One is a very large backyard, which connects to a porch, which connects to the kitchen. The dogs have free access to that. I have two other runs that are connected to the garage, and a dog room in the garage, which is open to one of the runs. I have yards rather than runs. I have two smaller runs with six-foot fencing and one is covered. I haven't used it yet, but the reason I have a run with a top on it is that one of my males can scale any fence that has been built. I finally decided that for his safety and ease if somebody is in heat, that he has to go in there. Other than that, it is a very casual place. The entire five acres is fenced in with a fence the dogs don't usually get out of. That's my setup.

Can males and females be run together, and males with males?

Males and females can be kept together. I have three mature males, including the Deerhound. I do not leave them alone together. When I am here, there is no problem. I know they have gotten into a spat when I wasn't here, so I just don't do it. When they are puppies, there is no problem, but once they get to be big boys, you have to be a little bit careful. The same is true of females. Sometimes you can get female rivalry, particularly if they are the same age. I have two sisters that don't get along well.

Kati (Piper) v. Sturmbuhl winning Brood Bitch with offspring Gottfried and Imme v. Hexliheim, at 1991 National Specialty.

The good mother and the bad mother?

Right. When I am here, I manage to keep things straight, because I am at least slightly the boss. Otherwise, there is never a problem between males and females.

What advice would you give to breeders who are just starting out?

First, understand the breed. Know what a Bernese Mountain Dog should be, and don't start unless you have a dog that is what a Bernese Mountain Dog should be. Try to understand inheritance. Study pedigrees. One of the most useful and valuable things a breeder can do is to study pedigrees. Over the years, before you become a breeder, you should mark your copies of the pedigrees with what the various dogs have as far as qualities and faults, and then begin to see what combinations will produce the right things. Once you are able to do that, then you will begin to know what to breed your dog to, because you will know the background of the dogs. A fairly rigorous study should lead to a breeding. By rigorous, I don't mean you have to attend a course, but you have kept an eye on what is going on in the lines you are interested in. Don't just go to the dog that has been winning the most in the show ring. Choose what your own experience and study, as well as the experience and study of other breeders, tell you might be a good combination. You can learn a lot from other breeders. People tend not to do that. They will go to the closest male or the big winner. It's not necessarily complementary.

Do you tend to breed dog to dog or pedigree to pedigree?

I try to combine both. Pedigree study is great, but if you have a dog with a wonderful pedigree but it is a crappy dog, chances are you shouldn't be breeding it at all, even if there is a wonderful pedigree behind it. That is something I have thought about a lot, because I know you can sometimes get pretty good results in the first generation by breeding a less-than-good dog, but what will happen in the next generation? That's what we have to think about. It's not just a science. There is a large part that is art when you are breeding dogs. That's where talking to other breeders, and experience, is so important. You can take two pedigrees that look wonderful together and you can have a disaster. On the other hand, you can outcross and get something very good. Unfortunately, there is a certain amount of trial and error involved in breeding, which means you will produce more puppies than you should, but that's part of the game.

Some people cull severely when doing that. Collie people do. When I asked them if they cull, they say, "It is my responsibility."

Yes, I know. There is a woman in this area who does test breeding of her Collies. I know a young man who got a puppy that had already been evaluated from one of those test litters. I think that's wonderful. I think Malamute people did that for a while, too, with the dwarfism they were experiencing. So far, we don't have that kind of problem. I have heard of a couple of cases of PRA in Bernese Mountain Dogs and I tend to think they were misdiagnosed. In England, they got a carrier from Sweden of trembler's disease, which is a neurological problem. Because they do a lot of inbreeding in England, pretty soon they had an awful trembler's problem. I am not sure how they handled it. I believe what they did is not breed any descendants of that dog. That was a tough one. Culling in Switzerland is done routinely on markings. They are done at the age of two or three days, and that's the only thing you can go on. I don't know what they do in Switzerland about blue eyes, because that shows up a lot later, but I suspect they are culled. Anything that we would have to test breed for, so far as I know, has not cropped up in our breed.

Are there kennels that you consider the best today?

There are some kennels that are very sound. Carol Ann Schmidt of Black Mountain Kennels has a good program going. She tends to import a lot of stock from Switzerland, dogs of good substance, good type and good character that she is developing. Carol

Alex, a puppy sired by Wacho v. Sturmbuhl, at six weeks and five days. Owner, Gail Miller.

Ann is in New Jersey. Debbie Mulvey in Vermont has been in Bernese for a long time. She is very knowledgeable. She has used both American-bred and imported dogs, and she knows where she is going with her program. I think she has done very well. Although she has quite a few dogs, I believe she is doing the right thing. I don't know the West Coast people that well. There is a woman named Kathy Donohue in Maryland who also combines imported dogs and American-bred dogs. She is also on a good track. I am sure there are others I could think of who, without being over-producers or getting carried away with making a living from the dogs, have a good aim. That's very important.

Is there an AKC video on the breed, and do you like it?

Yes, there is, but it is not a good one. It didn't work. There was a judge who was there when we made it. Debbie Mulvey was there, too, acting as an advisor. She knows the breed very well, but, unfortunately, the judge would overrule most of her decisions of what should be shown. The judge was not a breeder. They could have chosen a breeder-judge. Sharon Smith, who has just produced a very nice book on the Bernese Mountain Dog, is a breeder-judge. She was there and I don't think she could believe some of the selections they made. It was not a success. The slide show that was produced before the video was more successful, but it, too, is flawed. It is probably a better tool to use than the video.

Is there enough literature – books and magazines – on the breed?

It's not too bad. There have been several books produced in the United States. The one by Sharon Smith is the most recent book and I think it is quite good. The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America has produced an illustrated standard, which everybody should have if they are interested in the breed at all. We also have a little handbook that was made for first-time puppy owners. The literature isn't bad. The best literature, however, is if you happen to read German. The best book on Bernese Mountain Dogs was produced a couple of years ago by a Swiss breeder, Margaret Bärtschi. Not only is it the best book on the breed, but it is the best book on any breed that has ever been written. It is extremely comprehensive. It goes into genetics, and is a very wonderful book. We wanted to have it translated, but the market is too small and it would be a big job to have it translated.

Do you read German?

Yes. There are some other books in German that are very good introductions to the breed. We're okay on books at the moment.

Are you involved in the clubs nationally or locally, or in an all breed club?

Yes, to all three. I'm on the board of the Western Pennsylvania Kennel Association. I'm not as active in that as I would like to be, but I do take part in some of their things. I'm one of the charter members of the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America and I am publications chairman and am active in that. I'm also a member of the local club and I try to go to their meetings. We got organized here around 1989. We made the rash step of volunteering to have the

National Specialty. There were very few Bernese people in this area, but we decided we could do it, so we did. As a result of that, we formed a club. The specialty was a lot of work, but there was an excellent committee of people. You need active people, and that's what we have, so the National Specialty came off very well.

How long have you lived here?

I've lived in this house since 1973.

Where were you before that?

I had a modern house then. This house is really old. It was built in 1858. My modern house was slightly south. I work in Pittsburgh.

What do you do for a living?

I'm a curator at Carnegie Museum of Natural History in the field of vertebrate paleontology.

Did you grow up in this area?

No. I'm a native of Michigan. I came here in 1962.

Where did you learn German?

I studied German when I was in college, and then when I got out of graduate school, I spent a year in Switzerland, so that really helps to keep the language going.

What was your postdoctorate position in Switzerland, and what is your connection to traveling to Europe now?

I had a research project on fossil mammals that took me to the Natural History Museum in Basel. Since then, I have traveled to Europe to collect fossils (France, Sardinia, Sicily) and to study in collections.

Where did you go to school?

I got my undergraduate degree at Michigan State and my PhD at the University of Kansas.

This bitch is a really beautiful dog.

Imme is a marvelous mover. From the very beginning, my girls have been escape artists. There is a creek in the valley where they like to go and sit.

Do you use any coat supplements to get the nice shine on their coats?

No. These dogs haven't been groomed, either. They are all dirty. If you feed a good quality food, they should have shiny coats. Even she has a nice ruff. Some of these coats we are seeing are incorrect. They are short, funny coats. This one, if anything, is too wavy. The famous Piper, her mother was even more so. When I groom them, mousse tones that down a little bit.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

Dogs take time, and they affect where you live. I tried to get into the country so they would have enough room. Dogs tend to keep you poor. They have to eat and have veterinarian attention, and this and that, so it certainly does affect your lifestyle. I have a little plaque some friends gave me which says: "This house is maintained for the comfort and convenience of my dogs. If you can't accept that, you can't accept me, so go away." (laughter) I appreciate that. You keep busy with various things. I do publications for the club and those things do keep you busy, outside of a normally busy work schedule.

Do you write for the national club, and what do you write?

I write an occasional column for the BMDCA's *Alpenhorn*. It is entitled "The Curmudgeon," which reflects the fact that I like to tackle varied problems of dogs from a somewhat ironic, somewhat critical point of view.

What have some of the benefits been of being in dogs?

The fact of having dogs themselves. The bond between people and dogs is such an old one and a very important one to help people understand who they really are. There are a lot of people who don't know that, but maybe they are more sophisticated than I am. I'm a pretty primitive person and this bond is the important one. The dogs don't question who you are or what you are, as long as you are there for them. Through dogs, you meet other people who feel the same way, and that's also important. You develop friendships with people who have fellow-feelings about the dogs.

Do you have any children?

No. I'm single. The dogs are enough children.

Of what accomplishment are you most proud in your life with dogs, or in any other area of your life thus far?

Basically, I am proud to be an educator, whether it is through dog-related publications, through judging in matches, helping Bernese fanciers understand the standard, or, in my profession, through telling people about past life forms and what they can teach us about the present – and future.

You have a wonderful voice. Have you done any radio, acting or lecturing?

Just lecturing.

Where have you lectured, and on what subjects?

I started in high school! Debating and other forms of public speaking were strong interests. Lecturing to college/university and public groups is a continuing occupation for me. For the most part, my lectures center on my research work on fossil mammals and field work in interesting places, such as the high Arctic and China.

Are there any issues we haven't hit upon that you want to bring up?

We've covered quite a few. I'm very much opposed to the commercialization of dogs. I don't think dogs should be treated that way, because that is not the correct relationship between dogs and people. I get very discouraged by the commercial world of dogs.

Are you talking about pet stores?

Kennels, puppy mills, inhumane treatment related to too much breeding, and inhumane treatment because of lack of care in who you sell a dog to. There aren't too many people who should own dogs. You have to balance the fact that you try and have good dogs, and it is nice to breed them once in a while. You have to watch an attitude that says no one is worthy of owning the dogs, because if you want to keep the breed going and make a contribution to it, then you need to breed. I am sometimes torn between having nice dogs and enjoying them myself and thinking maybe other people should have nice dogs, too.

Are they becoming very popular?

In the last few years they have really increased their standing in AKC registrations. I think they were in the high 60s most recently, but just a few years ago they were around 90th in popularity, so that's a lot of puppies that are being produced. They are awfully cute puppies and are very appealing. I don't know whether people know they are getting a big dog, that it will be boisterous for the first three years of its life, and that they have health problems that have to be watched. Our dogs are from a cold climate, raised in mountainous areas and they have heavy coats. I don't know how they do in the warmer parts of this country. I won't sell to the South. I will to New Mexico because there are mountains and that's different, but Florida and those places, no. When you look at pictures of the dogs from there they lack the glorious Bernese coat. Perhaps that is better country for the Great Swiss Mountain Dog with its short coat.

You wonder about Elkhounds and Siberians, too.

Yes. Why do people have those dogs down there? There are plenty of hot climate dogs.

Thanks very much!

Okay. It's been fun. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

April Rifenburg

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
April Rifenburg
STARBOURNE
Lodi, California

This interview was conducted at the home of April Rifenburg in September of 1996 by Nanci Manceau.

Where did you get your first dog?

It was about nineteen or twenty years ago when I discovered the Bernese Mountain Dog in a dog encyclopedia. We had a Labrador at the time. I have been interested in dogs all my life. I had Dalmatians and some mixed breeds from the pound, and so on. I discovered this picture of the Bernese Mountain Dog as well as a Rottweiler. I was very taken with them both, but in those days nobody really knew what a Rottweiler was or a Bernese Mountain Dog! It was difficult to find people in those days who had Bernese, but I called some breeders in California and asked them about the traits of the breed. I decided I liked the way the Bernese Mountain Dog "sounded." I had young children at the time and wanted a dog I could have out on the front lawn that would stay around (not roam) and that wouldn't be overly aggressive with the kids or with people coming in and out. All of a sudden I found a breeder in Fairfield who had her first litter. She invited me over to see her puppies. Needless to say, I came home with "Heidi." Heidi was born in 1977, so it was about nineteen years ago. I did a lot of things with Heidi. I worked her up through obedience. That's how I got started in obedience. She got a CD, CDX, UD and then she got a TD.

Did you show her in the Breed ring too?

I showed her a little bit in the Breed ring. There were so few Bernese Mountain Dogs in those days and sometimes we were the only ones, so I got discouraged, and that wasn't my prime reason for getting the dog in the first place. She was my pet and I had young children so I just didn't gravitate toward the Breed ring. I think she got a Best of Breed one time when there were two or three dogs entered. She had maybe a point or two and that is as far as I went with her, but I went a long way in obedience with her. She won High in Trial at the National Specialty three times, once as a novice, then three years later out of Open B. About three years after that, when she was eight and a half, she won it out of Utility at the San Francisco Specialty and we retired the High in Trial challenge trophy.

Did you breed her?

No, I never bred her. She was dysplastic. That's one thing that led me into being site operator for the Berner Garde database, which acquires information related to genetic traits. I enter OFA and GDC hip and elbow certifications as a volunteer. It takes a lot of time, but I enjoy it and we are seeing an improvement.

Is it just for Bernese?

Yes. Many of the other breeds are following our lead by establishing computer databases to track genetic diseases. The goal is to make our dogs healthier. In fact, so is AKC.

Were you instrumental in starting it?

No. I credit that to Barbara and Martin Packard, who probably had one of the first Bernese in California. They have always been very interested in health and in improving the breed and they have really dedicated their lives to doing so. I also credit them with starting the GDC, which is the Genetic Disease Control program that is operated out of Davis. That registry is for all breeds and all medical problems.

Do they do the testing there?

Yes, or you can have your vet do it and then send radiographs of hips, elbows, shoulders or eye certifications. A person might want to mention if their dog has epilepsy or any of the heart problems that some of the different breeds get. It is a record-keeping type of thing, and the idea is that when you go to breed your dog, when you are checking out the potential sire, you can check his gene pool. They are stressing you need to breed for genotype as well as phenotype.

How did you eventually get into the showing end of dogs?

It looked interesting to me. I got a second Bernese Mountain Dog that was born in 1984, and he didn't turn out to be show quality. He turned out to be severely dysplastic. I knew it when he was nine months old because I could see it. He was just the neatest dog, a beautiful dog. I didn't know if I should try and place him or euthanize him, and I kept him. I decided if he was going to live with me he would at least have a CD. He handily got that.

He was a nice heeling dog and got beautiful scores. The next thing I knew we had a CDX, and he "accidentally" got his Utility title. I had a Labrador at the time that I was competing with in Utility and the Bernese Mountain Dog, Rifs Turbo Charger, was so smart he "picked up" the Utility. By that time, the AKC had lowered the Bernese jump height to once their height so I felt comfortable jumping him, and actually he was my best jumper. I never practiced him to death. He had his Utility degree by the time he was four and a half and then he went on and got his TD. So that was my second Bernese Mountain Dog.

Then Nitro came into my life. I had met Bobbie Hefner, his breeder, earlier at an obedience trial in 1987. She was there with her first young Bernese Mountain Dog, "Lacey." I was taken with Lacey and played with her a little bit. Little did I know that about three years later I would be getting one of Lacey's puppies. Lacey had OFA excellent hips and clear elbows. In those days we were really having a lot of hip and elbow problems, so I was attracted to her for that reason, and she had a lovely temperament. Bobbie bred her to a dog named Dallybeck's Echo Jackson, also clear hips and elbows. It was his and Lacey's second litter. I went there to just look at the litter and I fell in love with "Nitro." I went back and looked at him a few more times. By then I knew enough about puppy temperament testing and such and I knew I wanted a dog that would be a pretty good obedience partner. Nitro passed the test with flying colors, in my estimation, although there is no right or wrong to this test. It's just a subjective thing. He raced out, retrieved and brought an object back to me on several tries. I could tell he had potential for obedience by that and his attitude.

I brought him home. He was a frisky little pup that did very well for me. He has gotten his CD, CDX, UD and two OTCH points. He has a United Kennel Club CDX. He has gotten a High in Trial at a Bernese specialty and he has gone on to get his TD and TDX. He has two AHBA herding titles. They are basically instinct tests because through AKC we can't get a herding title because Bernese are in the Working Group. He showed a lot of potential for herding though and he has what is called an AHBA/HCT, which is Herding Capability Tested. This year he got his Novice Draft Dog title pulling a cart. He backs it up and maneuvers this two-wheeled cart around, which is a little cart my husband built to see if I was going to like drafting and if Nitro was going to like it. He did and is very well trained and responsive to my voice commands. I feel as if I could have sat in a chair and told him "left turn" and "right turn" from the lawn and he would have done it. He is now an official Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America Versatility Dog, because he is also a champion. He got his championship when he was ten months old. He has been a wonderful dog for me.

What size dog is he?

He is a moderate dog, about 25 1/2 inches tall and 95 pounds. He has weighed 98 pounds, but because I work with him a lot I keep him under 95. Now that he is retired he is hitting 95 pounds more often. When I was actively jumping him I kept his weight around 92 pounds. Even though the jump height was lowered in 1985, I watch the stress of landing on the shoulders and front assembly. I've always been careful of it because my first dog, Heidi, had to jump once and a half her height, and in Open I had her jumping 36 inches before I figured out

April, Nitro and Banner, first place Brace obedience and High Score in Non-Regular classes, BMDCA Specialty, April 1996.

that I could get away with 34. Her first two legs on her Utility degree were at the 34-inch height. She wasn't a big Berner, but I would still cringe when I saw some large Rottweilers and Berners having to jump that once and a half height. I was very happy to see it come down to once their height for Berners. I worked on the lowering of that height and there is another woman who did an in-depth study on the effects of landing. She did videos and a lot of scientific research on how landing affected the fronts per pound per inch. That was one of the things that convinced AKC. At the same time, they lowered it for all breeds to once in a quarter from once in a half.

Has Nitro been your biggest winning dog?

Yes, I think so, because I could compete with him a little harder and longer in everything. He is very willing and learns easily. He is extremely intelligent, and I know more about training now. Obedience training has developed and grown a lot in the last five years, let alone in the last fifteen years. Fifteen years ago we were archaic with it, and it has improved. Back in the days of Heidi, we did a lot of jerking on the leash. Trainers didn't want to use food or positive motivation back then. They thought that you just didn't do that with a dog. I figured out with Heidi I needed to do that in the advanced classes, so I was pretty free with using food, a lot of praise and short training sessions. I can remember having her at obedience classes and thinking, "They're heeling forever here!" I would not heel her that long. I would pull her out, play with her and then go back in. They don't need tedious repetition. We wouldn't want to do it ourselves! (laughter)

Have you done any breeding?

Not very much. Hopefully my girl is pregnant. I bred "Lika" to Nitro and I am hoping we get some nice, beautiful pups for the show ring, obedience potential, tracking, agility – the whole nine yards.

Has the mother dog done all those things too?

She has two herding legs – the HCT. She has tremendous herding instinct, which she got from her mother, and her father is an actual cattle ranch working dog from Canada. The reason I was interested in him is that he is descended from the Swiss Waldacker line and Bernetta line, both very heavy into working ability years back. They wanted to preserve that, so when I found out this dog from those lines was in Canada and was the father of a litter, I went home with my Lika. I haven't had time to get her CD yet, although she is trained for her Companion Degree. She is one of these girls that comes into heat every six months, so we have to fit showing in obedience around that. She is a champion, Ch. Swiss Star's As You Like It TD. She got her championship when she was younger. She is a very nice specimen of the breed with beautiful movement and structure.

I've never done much breeding because I never felt I had dogs that were sound enough or good enough specimens to breed, until now. I really want to make sure that we have as much of the right stuff going as possible – the soundness, temperament, brains and conformity to the breed standard, with all their teeth, etc.

Do people do not only the OFA but the thyroid and heart testing?

Yes. I've checked all that. Both of them have had blood tests. Nitro has had one other litter that I am happy with thus far. It is still under a year old. I didn't breed him early because I was busy showing him in obedience and I was a little afraid it would cause him to lose focus. I think it did a little bit. I've shown him a couple of times since then and I thought he was a little less precise – a little more interested in what the other dogs looked like and smelled like. We'll put it that way! (laughter)

How many dogs do you keep now?

I have three Bernese Mountain Dogs and a Labrador Retriever, which is the most I've ever had. I do so many things with them, including agility. Nitro is a very agile Bernese. In fact, most Bernese Mountain Dogs are pretty darned agile. My other male was very large. He was 27 inches at the shoulder and weighed over 110 pounds and he was very agile. I took him to an agility event years ago, maybe in 1985, and he went over all the equipment. I have never competed in agility for a title – yet. In California, just last year there were some actual trials. They were highly successful. People have gone wild for agility here. While Nitro is trained in it, I have never trained him to the point where I felt I could compete for an agility title. I was doing something else with him, but I was looking at it for this year and thinking I would try it. It is a little different in the ring

Left to right: Banner, Nitro, Lika.

because you have a time factor, they can't go past an obstacle or tick a jump, so whether he would get a title or not, I don't know, but he can do it in practice. So can Lika, and "Banner" is even learning it. It's a lot of fun. People love agility because you see success quickly and the dogs love it.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

I came up with my kennel name because my dogs are from Swiss Star Farm and I admire her program. She has become a good friend. I thought, "I have to have 'star' in the name." "Bourne" is kind of a Swiss-sounding name for town or domain, so I thought of Starbourne. My dogs are born from a "Star," and I put it together and decided to go with it.

How would you describe the ideal conformation for a Bernese?

There are several different types of Bernese dogs. I prefer the draft type, sturdy and full-bodied with a wide back and strongly developed rear and nicely balanced. I don't like too long a leg. I like medium neck, neither too short or too long. I like a well-proportioned dog with good bone that looks strong enough to pull a cart and yet agile enough to do a little herding work, which they were originated for in Switzerland. They should move fluidly, but not like an Afghan. I like good reach and drive as long as it is not overdone. The natural working gait is a slow trot. At increased speed, legs tend toward the centerline.

The head should not be Saint Bernardy, which we are having a tendency to do in so many breeds to get them squared up. I want a nice stop, a lot of substance, and a rather short muzzle, but not too short. I want a wide look. Banner has the ideal head for me. The head should not be setter-like, yet it shouldn't be like the Saint Bernard. The head is distinct, very typey for the breed. I don't want too much flew or drooling. The mouth should be dry and drooling is a fault. I don't want overly developed flews. I like tight, dark eyes. Sometimes, as the heads get bigger, we get the droopier eyes. I don't want to see the dogs too large or too small in size, nor gay tails.

What is the ideal size?

The BMD standard is: males 25 to 27 1/2 inches and bitches 23 to 26 inches. About 26 1/2 for a dog and I don't like to see them any more than 27 inches. I like to see the bitch a good 24 inches. Some of them will be 25. I don't like to see them 22 inches. When I first got into it years ago, I believe the standard was 21 1/2 to 28 inches, so we have fixed that bit. We brought up the lower end and lowered the top end, trying to make the breed more uniform.

What is the ideal Bernese temperament?

Good natured! Nitro is VERY friendly and I sometimes question his watchdog abilities. He does alarm-bark. Sometimes Berners are reserved with strangers, although Nitro never is. They want to size up the person. They should be friendly, but know the difference between friend and foe. I don't like to see them barking for no reason. One of the reasons I got into the breed is they were not known for incessant barking. My Berners only bark at something that needs to be barked at, and when they bark, I look. The Bernese Mountain Dog should not be overly excitable. Sometimes the males, if they get into a home where there isn't a strong pack leader, can be very energetic and overly doggy – meaning a lot of leash pulling and a lot of excitability to smell other dogs. I don't like that. I have seen this as a trait, a tendency for that in the breed. When I got my second Bernese Mountain Dog, I was a little concerned because I had seen males that were overly excited at other dogs in a friendly way. They are not generally aggressive, and we don't want to ever see that in the breed. They love other dogs. They LOVE other Bernese Mountain Dogs. I have noticed that some Bernese, especially males, are overly stimulated by other dogs to the point where they are difficult or impossible for their owners to control.

Isn't that a training problem then?

When I got my first male I found he was that way a little bit. Living with me took care of that – I guess. At

Swiss Star's Nitro Whatagas, Top Utility B, 1995.

Ch. Swiss Star's As You Like It TD, "Lika."

any rate, it never became a problem with him. He was also neutered at age three. They can become dominant, but as a rule I would call them a laid-back, mellow breed after they have matured. As soon as I say that, somebody comes along with a high-wired model! (laughter) I had a rescue dog once that was high-wired. He was two years old and I found out he had been living cooped up in an apartment. We have a few acres here and I just let him run. It was kind of scary at first because he acted just like a Border Collie and was tearing around. Every time I let him out to run, he ran less and less, and within a week or two he was lying in front of my garage with the rest of the dogs, acting like a Bernese.

They love to do things with their people. They just want to be with their people. They will carry baskets and do all kinds of things for you. One unique thing about them is they can be playing or running around, and if you need to call them in to the house or yard, they settle right down. My friends have noticed that about not only my Bernese but other people's Bernese, that they have this ability to say, "Okay, time out." I don't think of them as a breed that would run a fence, barking and carrying on. They mellow into your routine very easily.

Are they natural retrievers?

No, not usually, but I have been fortunate in that all my Bernese have been natural retrievers, even though it's not typical I'm told. Mine like to carry things, and I also probably develop it in them when they are puppies from day one by the things I am doing with them. I play with them a lot, I stimulate them to want to pick up things and put them into their mouths, but Nitro was definitely a natural retriever.

What age do you start the puppies doing obedience type of things, or leash training?

Right away. I start the "come" the

day I have them. I do everything off-leash. It is part of the routine. I might go out and call "Puppy, come," or use the puppy's name, and I have a little cheese ball. They just begin to kind of hang around and listen to me.

Do you have regular kennel space for them?

Just recently I put up a pen in the backyard, but I never have before. They have their crates in my garage which are open. They use those more often in the colder months during the winter than they do in the summer. Bernese do not take to the heat very well, so you won't find them in a little tight place in the summer. They sleep in the crates in winter at night. Because I have a female, we put up a chain link area in the backyard. I had a bitch in for breeding and I wanted a safe place for that to be going on. Ordinarily, though, they are a part of the family and in the house part of the time. They go with me a lot.

Do they like water?

Nitro loves water and Banner likes it, but Lika does not particularly like it. She'll wade, while Nitro and Banner will swim. As I have gotten older, I find I don't get out with them around water, so they don't have the opportunity to swim that my other male did, who was almost a Newfoundland at heart. When he was four months old I was with some friends at a lake and he got in the lake and swam out to the middle of it, along with his four-month-old friend, a Belgian Sheepdog. It scared us to death. That Bernese always loved water and was always out swimming, staying in the water till called in to shore.

Are they descended from the Newfies?

They descended from the Roman Mastiff in Europe. When the Swiss fanciers resurrected the breed in the early 1900s, they bred one in with a Newfoundland because they wanted to work on the temperament and put more bone into the breed. I'm sure that's where we get some of the hair, the square head and the mellow temperament. I understand that earlier they were a little sharper in temperament than they are now and we don't want to see any sharpness in the breed.

What are the most serious faults in the breed today?

We still have a problem with hips and elbows, the soundness, and you get that in any large breed.

What about missing teeth?

We've had some with missing teeth, but in the big scheme of things that doesn't bother me as much as a lot of limping and pain in their joints. We have a lot of cancer in the breed. I consider that a problem, although I believe it is in a lot of breeds, just as it is with humans. We have an ongoing cancer study to try to identify if it is genetic or environmental. There are some skin problems, in that some dogs have bumps and itching that worries people. Von Willebrands is not an issue in the breed and as a rule I don't think we have a lot of eye problems. We used to have inverted eyelids, but I think good breeding fixed a lot of that. It will still crop up from time to time and I pray that people won't breed it, thinking, "Oh, well, the dog has good hips." In breeding dogs, we have to look at the whole dog. There is no such thing as a perfect dog, but I would hate to see inverted eyelids get started again.

One of the other major problems in the breed is longevity. They don't live as long as we'd like them to. We see a lot of them dying before they are seven.

Is that an average?

It's kind of an average. That's how it is computed. My first one lived to almost fourteen, and there are many Bernese Mountain Dogs that are over

Bernfield's Astrea V Car Mar.

ten, and yet there are many that are dying at two, three, four and five years of age. We're working on longevity. An excellent speaker who most people know, Dr. Ian Dunbar, who is an animal behaviorist and veterinarian, was giving a talk on animal behavior at our recent Bernese Mountain Dog specialty held here in April of 1996 in San Mateo, California. He talked about behavior and then said, "I understand longevity is a problem in your breed. You know how to solve that, don't you? Don't breed any of your males until they are seven." Then he moved on to something witty on another subject. It was a very simple, direct, to-the-point statement. We are breeding males at age one. If we're lucky, maybe they will still be alive at ten, but if we're not, we haven't really seen what that dog is going to be. What he said would take care of it in a nutshell, although I think he was probably being a little oversimplistic. That was something that just kind of struck me. There is something to be said for that.

Most people who breed Bernese do breed only sound dogs. They either register hips and elbows with OFA or the GDC, and some of them are using the Penn Hip. Some people are getting two, both OFA and GDC. We have made headway in the soundness department and I hope we will continue to do so.

How important is the hair coat, and is it uniform for the breed?

It's pretty uniform. We see some curly coats. The standard calls for slightly wavy or straight. I like straight. They should have a nice, shiny hair coat. It should be thick and plentiful. I don't like to see it overdone. I don't like the Rough Collie look in Bernese, but I don't like the bald look. Sometimes we will see a kind of dry, wiry, dull coat and that isn't good either. Bernese are a working dog, a natural dog, and should have a coat that reflects that heritage.

Do they sometimes get excessive white?

Sometimes, but that is frowned on. There is a standard for the markings of what is ideal, acceptable and what is not acceptable. Sometimes dogs' markings will be less than perfect. Maybe there won't be enough white on the front feet or the muzzle may be brown on one side. If the dog is overall outstanding in body type and movement, head and coat condition, coloring may be secondary. They are rated on points and it is not the end of the world if a dog's markings aren't true, but yet that is what you hope to see. Everyone likes a well-marked Bernese. I know in Europe they don't like too much white. We have changed it a little from when I first got into the breed. Now we want white on the tail tip, but when I first got into the breed, it was just "permissible" if you had that. Some dogs will have a few hairs of white and I've seen judges look for it. We don't want to see too curly of a coat. That is frowned on.

Is the standard a good one for the breed?

Yes. We, as a breed club, have worked on it and I like it.

Will popularization help or harm the breed?

One of the reasons I was attracted to the breed is because it was uncommon, and I thought they were beautiful. I think many people today also think they are beautiful. I don't think they are a dog for everybody because they can be a little sensitive. Some people want a dog they can yell at. Most Bernese don't take well to that. They don't like a heavy hand. You don't have to tell them too many times to do something, or in order for them to behave themselves – after they are two or three years old. They can sometimes be pretty rambunctious when they are puppies. They are not the kind of dog that can be left out in the backyard. They really do need their people.

What are the drawbacks?

Some people don't like the size and the coat. They do shed. I've had people call me and ask, "Do they shed?" Oh, yes, they shed! There are always a few hairs around. They have a heavy shed. Some will shed twice a year and some of them once. Most of the males do it once and most of the bitches do it twice. I don't think there are a lot of drawbacks to the breed, but I'm prejudiced.

Other than in obedience, do you always show your own dogs?

For conformation, my first dog was shown by a friend. That happened accidentally, because I was entered in a TDX test with my Labrador. I had entered the show with Nitro as a puppy just to get him out socializing. Some

Am/Can Ch. Swiss Star's Spangled Banner TD, "Banner," in BMDCA Specialty Parade of Titleholders, April 1996.

Nitro heeling.

of my friends were going with their Berners. The Lab got into the TDX test, which was a lot more important to me than the conformation. Meanwhile, I had a friend who said, "I'll show Nitro for you." She had a Doberman and the Dobermans went into the ring right after the Bernese. I said, "Okay, that would be good for him," so off he went. I was anxiously awaiting them that night and wondering where they were. I got a call that night and my friend said, "Do you want to know what happened with Nitro? He took a four-point major and Best of Winners." I said, "You're kidding me!" And I had missed it! We were all excited. She took him the next time for a five-point major. She showed him to his championship for me, getting another five-point and four-point major. That's how Nitro got his championship, but just about every time he went I didn't see him because I was doing the TDX tests because the Labrador did not qualify in his first couple of TDX tests.

I showed Nitro in Best of Breed several times. In 1994 I showed him four times and he won Best of Breed three of those times over other specials owner-handled. That's about all I've done with him in conformation. Now that he is retired from obedience, I have thought about it since I have a little more time, but I have other dogs that I want to do things with, so we'll see what happens with that. Nitro is currently doing agility and training toward his Open Draft Title.

When Lika came along, I showed her to her championship. She did some very nice winning. She won at the February Cow Palace Show. There were 70-some Bernese there and she took her first major owner-handled, and Best of Winners and Best of Opposite. Those were some very nice wins and I was really thrilled. I showed her at the supported entry Santa Clara show and she took Winners Bitch and her litterbrother, Swiss Star's Mid Summer Night, "Oberon," took Winners Dog and Best of Winners. He is a well-known dog now. I like to tease the breeder by saying, "I could have had that dog!" (laughter) But I took Lika, and she has been an equally nice specimen of the breed. She was from a lovely litter. Out of eight puppies, seven of them have passed their hips and elbows at this time. We're very happy with that. Out of eight puppies, that's very good. Both Lika and Oberon have good genotype, which is so important when breeding. It puts more of the good genes into their pups.

How do you start tracking with the puppies?

Oh, that's a lot of fun with the puppies! It's easy to do them because they still have their instinct for following their mother and their littermates by putting their noses to the ground. That's how they maneuver around as canines, so I just play on that. With a puppy, I use a little leash and collar. I don't go into harnesses. I find a little grassy spot, but not a lawn. I like to see my footprints because then I know where I stepped. I will have someone hold the puppy while I show it the food and a glove. I will walk out maybe five or ten steps and show the puppy the food and glove again, put it down, and come back along the same track. That's called double-laying. I come back to the puppy and say, "Let's track," while I point to the ground. I do this just to see what the puppy will do. I have a short leash so I can guide the puppy if it starts to run off to the side. If I have to, I will guide the puppy along the footsteps I made, which I can still see. If the puppy goes by itself, so much the better. When we come to the end, the puppy gets his little treat on the glove, and I will praise and play with the puppy.

You can also drop some food pieces along the track as you are coming back, or going out, to help the puppy put its nose down. The first time I may not do that because I just want to see what it will do. I will do some "happy talk," and as the puppy puts its nose down more, I talk less. The end product, after they have done this for a week or so, is that you don't need to say much to them. I say as little as possible. If I see there is a confidence problem I might use some encouragement, but as you get into the tracking program, a lot of talking distracts them from the task at hand. Eventually I use a harness. I use a six-foot leash for a long while. Eventually I go to the twelve-foot. I do not allow the puppy or dog to get off the "fringe" during the foundation work.

Is there a command?

I will say, "Find the track."

At the real tracking competition do they end up with the glove?

They end up with a glove or a wallet, something leather. That's for the TD, which is 440 to 500 yards.

Do they have to pick it up?

No. They just have to indicate it. I like mine to pick it up, but they can stand over it, nose it, paw it, pick it up, lie on it. Some people train their dogs to lie on it, which is very clever and looks nice. I've thought I might try that one of these days. It is very nice when you get to the TDX test where they are finding four articles – three, actually, because one is at the start. That way, you know for sure they got it and you don't miss it. Nitro has always picked them up and brought them to me.

And you do this two or three times a week?

With my very first dog, Heidi, she got her tracking degree and I followed the Glen Johnson method almost to the T. The Johnson method is the granddaddy of most tracking programs. Anyone who is going to start tracking should look at his book. The method is pretty extensive and requires five to six days a week. You could do it all in one week, or you could spread it out over several weeks. There was a chart to follow. When I got to my second dog, I used a modified version of it. When Nitro was a pup, I used my own version and did two tracks a day. Soon he was doing turns, increased age and cover changes.

Banner at TD test with April, March 5, 1995.

As the puppies begin to track on the short tracks, you gradually make the tracks longer. There are charts and programs people have developed to help you learn how to extend length and how to extend the time on them. When you first start out, you do them right away. As the tracks get longer, you find they are a minute or two or three old. As the dog is getting better and the tracks are getting longer, you might wait five minutes before you set out on it. The tracks go from being double-laid to being single-laid. When they are tracking well on straight tracks, then you introduce the first turn. You might make a curved turn. I made a 90-degree turn. The second leg would be shorter than the first.

With Nitro, when I laid one track out in my field it would be maybe 70 yards. I would make the second track and, of course, I would walk from the first to the second. Nitro would track the first track, pick up the glove and then track, continuing to follow along where I had walked to make the second long track back, so I knew we could make turns. I accidentally introduced him to turns that way, and he was such a natural tracker that I really didn't have to do any elaborate things like spraying the turns with bacon grease or anything like that.

When one gets into it and is actually tracking, he or she might encounter little problems they need help with. It is interesting how creative you can become. It's nice if you have a buddy to track with or if you are tracking with a dog training club. If you have an instructor or mentor, there is a blending of ideas. Those people can learn from you just as easily as you can learn from them. With just about any kind of dog training, the trainer has to be creative in discovering ways to show the dog what he/she wants the dog to do. It is interesting what people come up with. Tracking is very enjoyable because the dog is essentially doing it. He is following his own canine abilities – his nose – and you have to learn to trust him. That's why at the beginning I want to see my track. As I get into it, I then use different types of grasses or bare dirt and different environments. But first you have that introduction stage where you are deciding how you are going to show the dog how to do it. The tracks are gradually lengthened, gradually aged and gradually made a little more difficult.

Are the dogs always tracking their owner's scent?

No. Ideally, when they get into it, they are tracking a stranger's scent, but I don't think it makes a whole lot of difference to the dogs. My dogs were more motivated for a stranger's scent because it is different. When I got to my third, fourth and fifth dog, I didn't have as much time to be tracking so I made a lot of my own tracks, especially with the TDX work with Nitro and Lika. I had to know where the tracks went. They were going over cement and over rocks and up and down hill and dale. I wanted to know exactly where the track was so I did a lot of my own tracking. I put some of the more difficult stuff in when I am training for a TD and I think a lot of people do that now. Tracking is easier for the dog than it is for the person. After that person understands what goes into tracking training then they will learn to trust their dog. It's nice if the person likes to be outdoors. If a person doesn't really like to be outdoors, they might not like the tracking, but when they see the dog following the human scent and finding something out there, and doing a nice job of staying on the track, they usually get hooked. It brings tears to your eyes when the dog picks up the glove for that title.

They have to pass that test one time, right?

Yes, one time, and it's a pass or fail test; it's not scored. I should add that Nitro has passed two tracking tests and one TDX test. Once they have gotten that title, it is hard to get into a second test because there are only so many tracks that are offered in a second test – say eight – and if you had nine people who entered, they give preference to the dogs that don't have the TD so that they can have a chance at it. If you happen to get a TD dog in a second test, you are lucky.

Why would anyone want to do it a second time?

I did it because I was supporting the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America at a National Specialty and they had room for me. I think they had ten tracks and they weren't filled, so they took my entry. AKC has developed a new tracking test. There is the TD, the tracking dog and TDX, the tracking dog excellent, which is much more difficult than the TD. To keep interest going in tracking, they have developed what is called the Variable Surface Tracking. That's where the dog has to go across several different types of surfaces. Tests can be done in an industrial area or a college campus where other people have walked. It's not done out in the woods as much as the TDX. It is more across pavement, asphalt, and it is probably a little flatter. At one practice session we had here at UC-Davis, they went upstairs in a dorm. (laughter) The dog that can get a TD, TDX and a VST will become a tracking champion. It is like the OTCH for the obedience trial champion. That program has started, and they want to encourage people to come into tracking who perhaps can't trail up a steep grade like you often do with the TDX.

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Is that what you give seminars on?

I don't give seminars! I GO to seminars! (laughter) That's how I learn. I have never done obedience training with a personal trainer. I will attend a seminar now and again, either obedience training techniques or behavior or agility, and I've been to a tracking seminar. I go just to learn the latest, but I have never trained with a personal trainer. I do everything myself.

It seems like that would be more rewarding.

Well, it's interesting. I have my own way of training – and each dog is different, so I change techniques accordingly.

Tell us a little about the drafting work.

I've just gotten into that the last year or so and it has become very popular with the Bernese Mountain Dog people. Early on when I got into the breed, most people had them for pets or for conformation. It was rare to see one in obedience. There were few obedience Bernese in those days and few draft work Bernese. It has been very enjoyable for me to see people become interested in the working abilities of the breed – the herding, the drafting, the agility. The drafting has been very popular because it is fun. There are a lot of workshops and drafting tests available. A lot of people are getting drafting titles on their Bernese. Another aspect is that the BMDCA offered a Versatility title award for Bernese. To earn this award, the dog has to have a drafting title, a championship, as well as a third title, which can be either obedience, agility or a tracking title. We are looking for well-rounded Bernese and people are finding their Bernese are much more than conformation dogs.

Do they pull someone in a cart?

They do pull people in carts. With my very first Bernese, I went to a workshop, a gathering of Bernese. This was years ago. There was a cart with a little seat for someone to sit. Unknowingly, I hitched my dog up to the cart. She had never seen one before in her life. She was harnessed up and on a leash and my 100-pound son sat in the cart and she pulled it with no problems. Nowadays, you don't do that. You condition them first to make sure they are comfortable with the cart before they pull any weight. That was done when I didn't know any better. Bernese are very acclimated toward pulling; they seem to love it. The test is interesting. There are some maneuvers they have to perform, like backing it up, going through a narrow spot and going around some things. They go through a gate and have to stop. They have to pull on command and do turns and that type of thing. It is done in a ring and there are two judges. Then they go on a half mile freight haul. They do that in a group. They also do a group stay hitched to their carts.

Is it done on command?

The novice portion is on leash and you can talk to your dog. The leash has to be loose, with no pulling, just like in Novice obedience. You are walking along with the dog, telling him what to do and what not to do. There is no weight in the cart and the cart can be anything. Ours was a homemade one but you can purchase carts of various sizes and with different types of wheels. For the freight haul they have a twenty-pound weight in it in the Novice class. The dog is still on leash at this point for the freight pull. When they get to the Open class it is done with no leash, so they need to know voice commands or hand signals or something so you can tell the dog where you want it to pull the cart. They can't bump anything with the wheels. It is kind of tricky. They must pull their weight for the one-half mile freight haul.

Are they four-wheel carts?

You can have a four-wheel cart or a two-wheel cart, or you can have a sled or travois. I've never seen a travois used but you could use that. Drafting is very enjoyable and people are really getting into it, so our conformation dogs are becoming much more than just conformation dogs by getting their working abilities highlighted.

But herding is not recognized for this breed?

Not by AKC because they are not in the Herding Group. They are in the Working Group and AKC doesn't recognize the working breeds for herding. I tested mine anyway because they were developed in Switzerland as all-purpose farm dogs and it says in our standard that they are to be able to do some droving work. The Bernese does not have the stamina of the Border Collie or Australian Shepherd and, no, they were not bred for that type of herding, but they are extremely capable of droving – moving the sheep or ducks from one pen to the other and running out in the paddock to bring them in for feeding time. They are very capable of doing that, but I have never known a Bernese that could run for 500 miles without stopping. They are, however, very capable of the close-in type of herding work, and there are many of them that do it for a living.

It was interesting that one of the first herding instinct tests we had in the United States for Bernese was done here. My friend and her husband are AKC herding judges and they do stock dog training near here. They judged a herding instinct test for Bernese Mountain Dogs. In fact, I was the secretary of it and organized it. There were about twelve or fifteen Bernese that showed up that day, and I think my two judge friends had been thinking, "Bernese, herding? Give me a break!" This was about five years ago. They were thinking of the Bernese as only a conformation dog and conformation dogs don't do anything. I think ten dogs passed and the judges wrote a little critique for our "Alpenhorn" newsletter on how impressed they were with the Bernese. They said they were thinking dogs and very biddable. The Bernese were not aggressive with the sheep but were gentle and kind, just as a Bernese Mountain Dog should be in temperament. They were also agile, and you could see the instinct come out in these dogs. Two of mine have strong instincts for it, especially the bitch. She has very strong instinct and seems to know what to do. If there were three sheep in the pen and they separated, ideally, you want the dog to be able to get the sheep back together – to get them out of a corner.

Are they taking commands?

Not at this point in the introduction. This is the American Herding Breed Association herding instinct test. There is one called the HIC, which is pure herding instinct. Although the dog is on a long line, they don't expect you to command the dog, other than being able to stop it if it was doing anything wrong. The second test they want more control. They want to see that instinct developing, and they want to see the dog able to stop on command, whether it is sits, downs or stands. They want you to be able to call the dog back and to see that it minds you. They are looking for a little more control at that point. If a person wants to go on in herding, there are lessons that need to be taken so you can signal the dog out in a big field as to how you want it to maneuver the sheep through obstacles. At that point, it becomes a lot more difficult. Bernese have a lot of herding abilities.

What do you feed your dogs?

I feed my dogs Nutri Nuggets from Price/Costco. I feel it is a very good dog food. It is a meat meal and they are now putting flax seed in it and the omega fatty acids, keeping current, and it is comparable to Iams. My dogs have been on that for years. My older Lab, who is thirteen, is on Hills KD. There was nothing wrong with his kidneys, but I think it extends their lives a little bit if you take good care of their organs and Hills KD is very low protein. Like everyone else, I have used several different brands, wondering which is the best.

Do you feed just the dry kibble?

Yes. I use scraps now and then. If I have vegetable water or leftover stew I will mix that in with their food. It's not really "scraps." It is perfectly edible food. I don't feed them a lot of fat or grizzle, but I do give them "people food" from time to time. If we've had some beans and there is some leftover, I will mix some in with their food. They seem to have good coats and are healthy. As a rule, I don't give them supplements, but with my bitch being pregnant, hopefully, I am giving her a little supplement, just because we do that with humans and I've been told it is good to do that.

What about grooming?

They need a bath every once in a while. They are difficult to get wet because their coats are kind of water repellent, but they are easy to bathe. I didn't use a blow dryer until Nitro was about two years old and I took him to a specialty where I watched all these people with their blow dryers. I went out after that and got a blow dryer. It cuts down on the drying time and really makes the dogs look pretty. They only need to be brushed about once a week. Banner has the thickest coat I've ever seen on a Bernese Mountain Dog and it is a lot of work, but the other dogs are not as much work as he is.

Do you do any stripping?

No, I don't do any stripping. I trim behind the ears because the ear hair gets long and looks kind of silly, so I trim that out, and I trim their feet. They get a lot of hair between their toes and trimming it keeps them from slipping, especially when showing them in obedience. If the backs of the hocks get too bushy, I also trim that, but other than that, I don't trim anything. They should be shown in natural coat.

What about whiskers?

I don't trim whiskers. One of the reasons I think I was attracted to the Bernese Mountain Dog is because it is a natural dog. I like to see them shown that way. I probably clipped whiskers on Lika when I showed her one time because she had a lot of whiskers and there were some black ones sticking out, but if I was to show her again, I wouldn't. As a breed, we have been discouraging that. Generally, dogs that are campaigned are trimmed because it gives them a clean look, but I think it affects their working performance. The whiskers are there for a reason and I think they use them to feel and judge things, such as distance and closeness and what not.

There has been some talk of dogs having ESP. Do you have any thoughts concerning that?

I think they do. Mine know when I am going to go somewhere without them. Of course, they know when I am going to go to dog school. I teach good manners classes privately. A friend and I have our own private dog training business. We have a puppy kindergarten. We have a "good manners class" with mainly a lot of teenaged dogs in it. We have developed an interesting method that works for puppies and adults and that is fun for people. One or two of the dogs get to go to that with me. I am also a member of a local dog training club, so I go there and do my dog training. They know when we are going to do that even when it is not a weekly thing. I also think they know when we are coming home. They know how I am feeling before I even see them sometimes. They know when I am happy and in a more playful mood and they like it better. They like it when I am happier. If I have a lot of mental stress and have a lot of things I have to get done, I notice the dogs are not quite as happy. Either they take on our personalities or they have ESP.

Dogs are a lot smarter than we think. There was a theory going around that they can't think, but they can think! I have seen any number of dogs think out situations and problems. I think they are making a breakthrough in the scientific community where they have decided dogs do have emotional feelings and they can think.

How long have you lived in this area?

We have lived here for 25 years. We have three grown sons. The oldest is 29, one is 26 and one is 23. One is married, one is about to be married and one is having a baby, so that is a whole new chapter we are getting to.

Do any of them have Bernese dogs?

No. One has a Golden Retriever, which he inherited. One couple have expressed interest in getting a Bernese Mountain Dog.

Do you belong to any local breed clubs or the national breed club?

I belong to the national Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America, which is a very good, ongoing group of people who are very much interested in the betterment of the breed and being responsible breeders. We don't want to see the dogs overbred and we really believe in breeding "best to best." I also belong to a local dog training club, the San Joaquin Dog Training Club, which is obedience oriented. We also offer classes for the public and promote responsible dog ownership. A lot of my life is involved in dogs. As I mentioned previously, I work on our Berner-Garde database for the breed, a volunteer effort that I enjoy. I like watching the progress we are making in breeding healthy dogs. The other club I am heavily involved with is the Sierra West Bernese Mountain Dog Club, our local regional club. There is also another club in San Francisco, the San Francisco Bay Berners, that I have done things with over the years.

Is there an AKC video on Berners, and is it a good one?

Yes. It's pretty good overall. It gives people the opportunity to see the dog. Dog buyers as a whole are more educated now. We are getting it across to the American people that they need to research the breed they are interested in. The Bernese needs to belong to a more mellow-type person, because that's the way they are.

What do you do for a living?

My husband and I have a business here in the house. He is an engineer and I'm his helper. I do the books and computer work. We have been doing that for nine years. On the side I do the dog training classes. I have a class going in Lodi and now one in Elk Grove. I also do a lot of volunteer things for dogs and the community.

Have there been any drawbacks to being so heavily into dogs?

No, never. As a youngster I was drawn to dogs. I had some dogs I got at the pound, and what not, and I took them to obedience class. I was always drawn to dogs and dog people. One of the strong things that draws you to

Nitro.

obedience class is that is where you find other people you can talk dogs to. I have always been that way and I gave up apologizing for it. Maybe it satisfies my maternal instincts, I don't know, but dogs are my very favorite animal.

Do you have any advice for breeders just starting out with these dogs?

Yes, I think I do have some advice for them. They had better do their homework and know the breed. They should watch their buyers, the people they place their puppies with, because we don't want to see these dogs in rescue type situations. That's the hard part of being a breeder, placing the puppies into good homes, where the family is not going to get divorced right off the bat, or the people are not going to get discouraged with their dog. Bernese go through a lot of growth difficulties where they look funny. They get high in the rear, their coats get curly, their heads get different, and so forth. A Bernese is a slow-developing dog and people need to be able to bear with that. New breeders should have good, strong stock and look at genotype with clear hips and elbows. Use the Berner-Garde database. That's what it's for. Use the GDC. That's an open registry and you can get health information from it. I encourage a new breeder, when they have that first litter, to register it with the Berner-Garde. They can send in their names and receive a form, or they can contact the file manager of it and get information in. That way, we can follow the growth and development of the puppies. We also keep in contact with new buyers. We send them information on joining the various Bernese Mountain Dog clubs. The new breeder needs to make sure he/she starts with sound, suitable stock, and doing everything that is possible to begin right. They should be concerned with improving the breed and be concerned with making good pets for people.

Do you have any kennel recommendations?

No, I don't think so.

Do you have any comments about the pictures of your dogs here?

Most of them are of Nitro, who is probably the most titled Bernese Mountain Dog in the United States at this time.

What is his full name?

His full name is Ch. Swiss Star's Nitro Whatagas UD, TDX, and then he has the Versatility title and the HCT herding title and the Novice Draft Dog title and a U-CDX. He is not a registered therapy dog, but he could easily pass the test and he has done a lot of therapy dog work. He has gone to schools and club meetings and demonstrated for people. He usually places on the Delaney system and certainly with the BMDCA in his class when they hand out annual awards. He has won High in Trial at a National Specialty. He has been a real super dog.

I've had Banner for only two years and he is an American and Canadian champion. His name is Am/Can Ch. Swiss Star's Spangled Banner TD. I got the TD on him and he has one leg on his CD. As the weather gets a little cooler here I would like to finish his CD, then possibly get him ready for the Novice Draft Dog title. He has a CGC (Canine Good Citizen).

Lika is Ch. Swiss Star's As You Like It TD, and she is trained for her CD, but I haven't shown her in the ring yet. I think she can be pretty competitive. I'm saving her out, but she also comes into heat a lot. She is also trained for TDX, if I can get her into a TDX test. Hopefully she can pass that. She is a good conformation dog and I would like to special her. She also has a CGC.

This is a picture of my first dog, Heidi, and she won High in Trial at the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America National Specialty three times and retired the trophy. This year, 1996, I donated the trophy, which I had retired for ten years, back to the Bernese Mountain Dog Club to be awarded to the High in Trial winner every year, and a beautiful working dog won it this year, Bright Eye Mira Belle. I want to see that bit of history continue in the club for a while, because one of the members made this leather and wood trophy, which shows the Bernese Mountain Dog working activities. This year we dedicated our Bernese Mountain Dog Specialty to the working breed ability. We highlighted and honored all the working activities, in addition to conformation. Usually, the working activities have been the stepchild of conformation. We are trying to get the working abilities more visible and more appreciated by people.

Do you have any other stories about your dogs?

We were in a local park and I had a couple of my Bernese with me, one of them being my female Lika. There were some police dogs there practicing some of their attack work, their Schutzhund type work. There are Bernese that have Schutzhund titles in Germany. Whether there are any in this country that have been trained for it, I don't know. Lika was so taken with that that she drew me over there. She had to get closer. I have never seen her look prettier. She was so beautifully stacked, with her head up, and she wanted to do that work. She is of German descent. Her father is from Europe originally. It really sparked something in her.

Properly controlled it's okay, but I don't like to see the average pet owner getting into any type of attack training because I don't think they have good enough control over their dogs to further develop that instinct. Of course, Schutzhund is tracking, obedience and some of the attack training, but a lot of the American public are doing it with their Rottweilers and Dobermans that shouldn't be doing it, because the dogs have enough natural guarding instinct, let alone being trained in it.

Thanks so much, April, for taking the time for this interview. It's been very interesting. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Carolyn and Bob Kinley

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Carolyn and Bob Kinley
SHERSAN
Painesville, Ohio

This interview was conducted at the home of Carolyn and Bob Kinley in May of 1995 by Lindy Patrick.

When and how did you get your first dog?

Carolyn: We got it in 1958. I wanted a Cocker Spaniel and Bob wanted an Irish Setter, so we got a German Shepherd.

Bob: We still haven't figured that one out! (laughter)

Where did you go from there?

Carolyn: In about 1961, a friend of ours came over with an Afghan puppy. I thought it was so adorable. By then, we had three or four Shepherds. A year and a half later, our friend called from Boston and said, "Lolly had puppies. Do you still want one?" We said, "Sure," so we got into Afghans and showed them. We had shown the German Shepherds too.

How did you get into Bernese Mountain Dogs?

Bob: I was handling Shepherds and Afghans, and a friend asked me to handle their Bernese Mountain Dog, and we fell in love with her. Carolyn was at Madison Square Garden and saw Pace's father, Davos and talked to Penny Parliman. Carolyn said, "If you ever get a good one, give us a call." About eighteen months later, we got a letter with a Polaroid picture in it and that was it.

Were you both handling at that time?

Bob: Yes.

Carolyn: Bob did most of the handling.

How many litters have you bred?

Carolyn: We are on the F litter the second time around, so it's about 30 litters.

When did you get Pace?

Carolyn: In 1979.

What is the best litter you've ever bred?

Carolyn: We've had quite a few of them. We had three litters of 100 percent champions. Pace sired another one in Texas that was 100 percent champion. He only sired seven litters, of which four were 100 percent champions and the rest of them were over 50 percent finished.

What is Pace's full name?

Carolyn: Am/Can Ch. Shersan's Change O'Pace V Halidom CD.

Tell me about how you planned the litters?

Bob: It was by both pedigree and conformation. We believe in linebreeding and to strengthen the line and develop it, you go out for correction factors, and then come back into your line. You have to look at both the paper and the actual dog itself. Sometimes the paper lies and sometimes the dog lies a little bit.

Carolyn: We were lucky enough that Penny had a bitch she thought was a very poor mother. She just didn't want to accept the puppies. Penny called and said if we'd like to have her as a pet we could buy her. That was Keri. The first litter she had with us, for the first couple of days she didn't want anything to do with the puppies. All of a sudden, it was like she woke up, and she took great care of them from then on and was a perfect mother after that. Pace ended up with 26 champions to his record. His son Black Tie has 33 so far.

Why did Pace only have seven litters?

Bob: We are very discriminatory in breeding. We didn't want him bred to just anybody. At that time, he was working his way up in the Groups and he was the top Bernese Mountain Dog in the nation for three years. We felt breeding him to bitches that were not of good quality would hurt his reputation. We were very picky on that.

Carolyn: He was only bred to three outside bitches, and two of our own, Keri and Ava. I don't believe that just because you have a good dog that you should breed to absolutely everybody who comes along. It is very questionable when you see every litter coming out sired by the same sire. It happened years ago in Shepherds. There was good old Troll. In every Shepherd pedigree if you go back far enough, you end up with Troll. He must have been bred to three-quarters of the bitches in the country. I hate to see that done. People just go to the dog that is popular.

Bob: A lot of people breed without considering the pedigree or the phenotype. They just breed to the top-winning dog. They breed to what is in front of them in the ring, without going back and learning the standard and breeding to the standard. We're bugs on certain things, probably because of our old Shepherd days. Soundness of structure and temperament comes first. They have to have certain markings to be pretty, but that is secondary in a sense. When we first started showing the Bernese Mountain Dogs were not sound, and they were not presented properly in the ring. They were farm dogs and were taken into the ring as farm dogs. They still had horse manure and whatever on them. I'm sorry. Judges do not like to go over a dog and come up with black hands. The breed has progressed quite a ways in being shown properly in the ring. At least, that's my opinion.

What were the dogs originally

used for?

Bob: They were originally farm dogs. In the Swiss standard they are called cattle dogs. They were used for cattle, for protection and carting. They pulled the milk to the cheese factory and pulled the bricks of cheese back home. They are a working dog. They were good for protection around the house. Our dogs are a little softer here than some of the European dogs, which I like. I've trained at police work in German Shepherds, and we don't need that in Bernese Mountain Dogs. John Q. Public does not need it at all.

About how many champions have you produced?

Carolyn: Born at this house, we have produced 52 champions out of a total of 93 puppies that are over two years of age. Every puppy that we have sold as a show potential, if their owners managed to actually get the dogs into the ring, has finished its championship.

That's amazing. It's over 50 percent. What is the best dog that you have owned or bred?

Bob: Obviously Pace as far as the ultimate in structure. We will never have another Pace. If you are extremely lucky, you will have a dog like that once in a lifetime. They are maybe one percent of the dog fancy. We were very fortunate to have a dog like Pace and to do what we did with him. The combination really clicked of Bobbie handling him and the fact that Pace hit when the Bernese Mountain Dog was coming up in popularity. He was a good, sound animal. I will never see another one like him in my lifetime. His son was very good, and we've had dogs in the Top Five and Ten in Bernese Mountain Dogs ever since Pacer, either through some of his offspring that have lived here, or through those dogs we sold and co-owned and worked with the people. The kennel has been up in the Top Ten in Bernese since 1982.

Carolyn: I think it was in 1984 that Pace was the top working dog. He ended up with nineteen American Bests in Show and one Canadian Best – I won that one! – and the one National Specialty win.

What about other dogs you have bred?

Carolyn: There is Am/Can Ch. Shersan Black Tie Required. At that time we were also showing "Dealer," Am/Can Ch. Shersan Halidom Ace in the Hole. We showed the two of them, so we showed one for half the year and the other for half the year, which wasn't fair to either dog, but there was no reason for both of them to be in the ring at the same time. They were both in the Top Ten for the years we were showing them.

You should have had a his and her.

Carolyn: Yes, and go in different directions. Candy Konicki is showing Am/Can Ch. Shersan's Life in the Fast Lane and he's been in the Top Ten for the last four years.

I know one or two of them were listed in the '94 Annual. It sounds like the dogs have been doing most of the winning. How about bitches?

Bob: Oh, yes. All our bitches here are finished. Rona is the second top-producing bitch in the history of the breed.

Who is in the picture with Bobbie?

Carolyn: That's Heartlight Baby Grand, a grandson of Pace, that won the National Specialty. His cousin, Abigail, was Best of Opposite to him. He's a Chip son and Abby was Tie daughter and Tie and Chip were full brothers.

Bob: It's hard to pick a favorite because they are all our favorite dogs and have all done well in the ring.

Is this a dog that loses its coat?

Bob: They go through shedding, especially about their second year. Of course, the females drop coat when they come in season. This year, we had two of them that went all the way bald. Right now, Rona is a coat machine.

Carolyn: Her mother used to do that too. Here is a picture of her when she was two. She had just had the "I" litter, which is Pacer's last litter.

Bob: It's hard to pick a favorite. As far as what he did in the ring, Pacer will always be our favorite or the one that we will remember more. Bobby is our fun dog, an American champion, and she just got her CD degree at six years of age. She's our clown. She just loves life. When she gets into the obedience ring, she just laughs at you. She does it, but she has fun doing it.

Carolyn: Everybody enjoys

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Ch. Pace.

watching her.

It must be kind of tough because you started at the top with Pacer.

Bob: In this breed, yes.

Carolyn: But we'd worked so hard in the other two breeds, and we'd also shown Rough and Smooth Collies, Belgian Sheepdogs, Italian Greyhounds, Keeshonden and an English Setter. All three of our daughters were in Junior Handling and at that time you didn't have to own the dog you showed in Juniors. A breeder would say, "I have this really nice dog your daughter would love to show," and we would end up with a dog here that one of our daughters would show. We had a lot of dogs that weren't actually ours.

Bob: At that time, we were very active, and still are, in the Western Reserve Kennel Club, where I was show chairman for three years, years ago, and we were very active in the all-breed world. When Pacer started to win, some judges said, "You paid your dues. Take what they give you and run!" (laughter)

Carolyn: The Bernese Mountain Dog people didn't really know us until we started doing all the winning, and it was like, "Who are you to come in here?" It's better now.

Are the Bernese your absolute favorite breed?

Bob: Oh, yes, definitely.

Because of the temperament?

Bob: They are very laid-back and an easy dog to live with. When they are eight or nine months old, they settle into their "groove," you might say, and from then on they are so easy to live with. They are very loyal. They love everybody, but they will bark when somebody comes up. They get along with almost everybody. Our club is very active in therapy work and the Bernese are very excellent in therapy.

Can you run all males or all females together in your kennel?

Bob: We can pack females, but not the males. There is only one stallion in a herd, and that's about the way it is with our Berners, although some people can get away with it.

Carolyn: Some people say they have a hard time packing their females. All their males will run together, but the bitches are bitchy. We can have seven females running together and there is no problem, and one male running with them. It doesn't make any difference which male. But as to running the males together, we are a little bit on the pessimistic side that we might have a problem.

Bob: Our old rule of thumb, and what we preach at our classes and so forth, is that you don't leave two of the same sex alone unsupervised. If they get into a discussion or disagreement, being the same sex, there has to be a victor, but if it is a male and a female the male will always back off. The female is 99.99 percent boss, and the male will back off, but two males or two females will go at it. Even when we leave here, there is one dog loose in the house. While I'm here, there can be four girls lying in the living room here.

Because you are the boss.

Bob: Yes, that's it. Something else we are very strong on is training. Whether it is a Heinz-57 or a purebred dog, all of them should be trained. They all should have basic obedience, and they all should be good citizens.

Do you do the Canine Good Citizen test?

Four generations, left to right: Ch. Keri, Ch. Ava, and Ch. Nessa, Ch. Pacette.

Bob: Oh, yes. Most of ours have that now.

Carolyn: We had six that passed the CGC last summer. Our club did it as part of one puppy match. They did the CGC and the Therapy Dog International at the same time. Six out of six passed.

What about temperament testing?

Carolyn: The temperament testing that I have read about and seen are things that we do automatically with the puppies from the time they are born. I pick them up, roll them over on their backs and scratch their tummies and all that sort of thing. They are exposed to different things in different areas of the house. We do that sort of stuff all the time playing with them. I consider it more playing with them than temperament testing.

"Benjamin."

Can the Bernese pedigrees be trusted for accuracy?

Bob: I believe so.

Carolyn: Pretty much so. There have been some errors found, but they have been computer errors, and the computer is only as good as the person putting the stuff in. One time I typed up an Afghan pedigree and when I looked at it, I said, "This is wrong!" I had skipped a generation. I sure did.

Bob: We don't have a lot of history and it is hard to get much history on some of the dogs coming from Europe. There we have some voids, so how do we know from there? As far as the dogs here in the United States, I believe those pedigrees are very accurate.

Carolyn: Beginning in the '70s, there were years when there were no litters registered in the United States. Even when Pace was at the Tournament of Champions, they made some announcement that Pace was in a breed that registered approximately 250 dogs a year. One person said, "Oh, that has to be an error. They mean 250 a month." I said, "No. It's per year." That was in 1982. It's only been about the last fifteen years that the popularity has grown. It's a little easier to do pedigrees when you don't have to go back twenty and 30 years.

Are people importing a lot of dogs?

Bob: There are some coming in from Europe. We imported a dog from Denmark ourselves. Carol was over to the world show and went to a kennel while there and made arrangements to bring a puppy back. There are dogs being brought in constantly from Europe and some of them don't have too much history on them. Someone in Switzerland asked why we would want to get the European dogs when our dogs were as good as theirs, meaning our kennel.

Carolyn: One of our daughters went over there, and I called the breeder in Switzerland, who said, "There is nothing over here as good as what you have in your own kennel." It was nice of her to say that. Unfortunately, when someone brings in a dog from overseas, everybody swarms to that dog because it is an IMPORT. Some stud dog owners are a little at fault in allowing everyone to use their imported dog before they really know what it will throw. You don't know what kind of problems the dog is bringing in. I wouldn't let the dog we brought from Denmark be used until I'd bred a couple of litters myself, so I would have the control of knowing what he would throw. Unfortunately, he died of a bee or wasp sting after he'd had his first litter.

Is the registration not as controlled in Europe and that's why there is difficulty in knowing the history on some of the imported dogs?

Bob: It's as controlled and probably as accurate, but we don't know the fine points of the dog itself, what it would be throwing. The pedigree would probably be fine, but who are the dogs two or three generations back in the lineage? What do they look like? Are they big, small, medium, leggy, or whatever?

Are the European dogs harder in temperament than the American Bernese?

Bob: A lot of the European dogs have a much harder temperament.

Carolyn: They are bigger boned and much bigger dogs.

Bob: There are two camps in Mountain Dogs, it seems, and we are

Dealer and Pacette, Award of Merit, 1990 National Specialty.

in the camp that does not believe bigger is better. Just because it is a bigger Sheltie, a bigger Bern or a bigger Saint Bernard, does not make it better than another dog. The Bernese Mountain Dog is not supposed to be a Newfoundland or the size of a Saint Bernard, but some of them coming in are very large. Some people are trying to breed a more aggressive, harder dog. I like the soft Berner. They will protect, however.

Carolyn: I am sure they would protect me if push came to shove, if somebody was stupid enough to walk in when the dogs are saying "Don't."

Bob: The breed does not need the reputation like some breeds have of being dog-aggressive or people-aggressive. In Europe, their shows are entirely different, and certain breeds have to be aggressive. A friend of mine just came back from judging in Europe, and Carolyn was at the world show, and some of the breeds there you don't touch. In the ring, the judge does not touch the dog, but stands back and just observes, because if you get near them you will lose your arm.

Carolyn: Luckily, the Berners weren't that bad, but the males were very definitely aggressive towards each other, more so in the ring than outside the ring. Two could be sitting side by side outside the ring, but when they went into the ring, they would get their hackles up.

Bob: We don't know if that is because it is just the way the people there like to show the dogs. Here, the judges would throw you out of the ring, and I say rightly so. Maybe our society here is different than theirs and what they want out of their dogs. I like the easy, laid-back dog that would still protect, but there is no outward manifestation of aggression to worry about. We are very strong on soundness and movement. They are a working dog and should be able to get out there and work for two, three and four hours. If they are not sound, they won't be able to do that.

Will you talk a little more about

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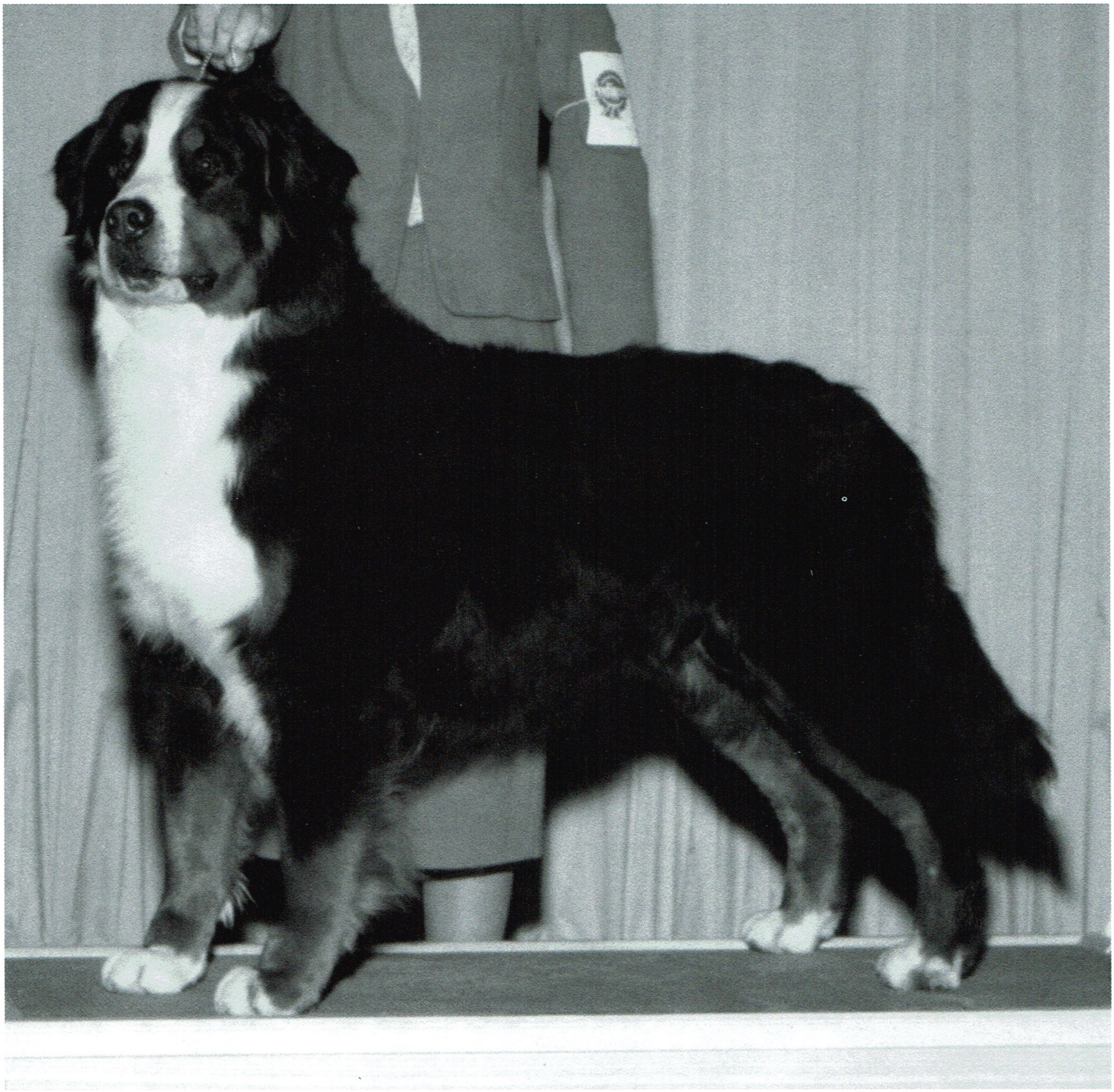
Shersan Chip off the Ol' Block, 1986 National Specialty Best Puppy in Sweeps, Winners Dog.

how you've used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when each should be used?

Bob: Yes, to all three.

Carolyn: When we first started out, we used very close linebreeding, because Keri's dam, Kara, was a full sister to Pace. We bred Pace to Keri three times so that was a very close breeding. Out of that we produced a lot of good dogs and didn't seem to lose size or substance. We kept the same temperaments, and got a lot of champions out of those breedings. I think there were only two of all those dogs that didn't finish. You need to outcross when you begin coming up with something you don't like. Victor, that we brought in from Denmark, had a little bit heavier head. As a three-month-old puppy, he looked just like Pace did as a full grown adult dog. I was hoping to get more coat and head from him and I did, although I think we lost a few brains, but we are getting it back in the second generation down from that. He served his purpose and now we are breeding back into our line and getting what I wanted to start with. It was just one generation removed, and not quite as quick, but you can't do anything quickly in breeding.

So that was very close linebreed-



Ch. Shersan Black Tie Required.

ing, but not really inbreeding?

Carolyn: Well, Pace and Kara were full sister/brother.

Bob: That's considered inbreeding. We went to linebreeding from there and then outcrossed and back to linebreeding. You prove your breeding program in the ring, as far as I am concerned. If your dogs are finishing their championships and judges respect what you are doing enough to give you your championships, then you are proving your breeding program. We have had judges ask us, "Do you have a dog in California?" They have recognized our type. Our dogs are very typey and many judges can spot our type of dog. There is another kennel that is very close in type to ours, and we respect them highly, also. We take it as a compliment when a judge asks us, "Do you have a dog in Alaska? I gave it a Group Four."

Carolyn: The dog was six months and two weeks old and the judge said he gave him a Group Four and it wasn't a gift because there were Group placing dogs he didn't place. That was Jordach who ended up taking a Best in Show.

What distinguishes your line?

Carolyn: I've had even novices call me and say, "The only dogs I liked at the show were your dogs, either sired by one of your dogs, or out of one of your bitches." Obviously there is a stamp.

Bob: Our dogs are of medium size and they are very excellent sidegaiters. They are sound, and are hammish. They love life. The temperament is there.

Carolyn: Some dogs are not happy to be there. There was one handler who kept saying to his dog, "Come on, wag your tail," while our dog was wagging away. Their attitude is a lot of what gives them wins.

Bob: It's an attitude in the ring.

Carolyn: A dog with a showy attitude will win faster than one that says it doesn't like showing.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

Bob: Davos, Pace's father. He has affected a lot of kennels, and I believe he is the top-producing male of all time.

Carolyn: There is another one that is getting very close.

Do you know his full name?

Carolyn: Ch. Halidom Davos von Yoddlerhauf CD. I would say Ch. Deerpark Heartlight is ahead of Davos, because a year ago Heartlight was at 43 and Davos was 44, and I think "Sparky" has had a few champions since then.

How many dogs do you keep now?

Carolyn: Thirteen.

Bob: Thirteen Berners and we have three Shiba Inus.

Carolyn: I like the Berners! Shibas are a nice little dog, but they are more a terrier-type dog. We like the more laid-back dogs and not the really active ones.

Shibas are cute dogs.

Bob: Yes, and very easy to work with. They are not the best obedience dogs, but they are easy to work with as far as showing, and they are very showy.

Carolyn: At least the ones we have are.

What's the most dogs you've ever kept?

Carolyn: When we had the Shepherds and the Afghans, we had quite a few.

Bob: In the twenties at one time, between the two different breeds.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

Carolyn: Our first two daughters were named Sherri and Sandy. The kids always knew they were in trouble when their father yelled, "Sher, San!" (laughter) Bobbie came along five years after the kennel was named and we couldn't figure out any way to fit it in that sounded decent.

Are all three involved with handling dogs?

Carolyn: The middle one is raising children now, but the oldest one is still handling dogs.

Bob: And Bobbie is full time. She handles all breeds, but primarily Afghans, Bernese Mountain Dogs and Akitas. She will have Terriers once in a while and some sporting dogs sometimes, Retrievers and soft-coated wheatens, and things like that, so she is handling all breeds.

Carolyn: She grew up with it. They are doing an interview with Bobbie, and I sent one picture along where she is three months old, and lying between two great big Shepherds, looking up and seeming to say, "Hi, dad!" She was just whelped! (laughter)

Bob: She was raised by the dogs, let's put it that way.

Carolyn: I am a fast whelper myself. I was in the hospital for seventeen minutes before Bobbie was born, and my friend who raised Dachshunds said to me, "You know, you are one heck of a good brood bitch." (laughter)

Do you name your litters by any sort of a scheme?

Carolyn: We use the alphabet.

Bob: We've done that in all the breeds we've had. It is much easier to immediately know who the sire and dam were. If it is the "A" litter, you know who the sire and dam are. It is so much easier when you are talking about a certain dog. You can immediately say, "That's out of ..."

Carolyn: Who's Baroness? It's Black Tie's littersister, because it starts with the same letter of the alphabet.

That makes it easier. It's hard enough between kennel names, the dogs' long registered names and the call names.

Carolyn: Yes, it is.

We already touched on this, but I will bring it up again. How do you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

Bob: Temperament first.

Carolyn: Soundness second.

Bob: Definitely. They are too big a dog. They have to have good temperament. If they don't have good temperaments, that's lethal. When you get a dog that is 90 or 110 pounds, that's a lot of dog. As a handler, I have broken up enough fights. When you try to pull two 100-pound Shepherds apart, it is almost impossible – by yourself, at least, and that doesn't work sometimes, either.

What is your overall, long-range goal in breeding dogs?

Bob: To try to improve the breed, to hold what we have developed, which we are both happy with, and to try to encourage people to show their dogs, participate in dog shows, and to do responsible breeding. That's probably the most important thing. As the breed becomes more popular, people will be breeding for one reason – to make money. They won't be breeding to improve the breed or to keep a dog to show. They just breed.

Carolyn: You should only breed when there is a good reason to breed. You should want to keep something, or be placing the dog in a home where it will be shown and trained, either in obedience or conformation. People shouldn't breed just because it is an easy way to make money, because it isn't. It isn't an easy way to make money and you usually don't make anything anyway.

Is this breed becoming more and more popular?

Ch. Pace.

Carolyn: Yes. I would say after Pace took the Group at the Garden. He is the only Bernese to win the Group at Westminster. If we would have had 200 puppies, we could have sold them.

Bob: Pace did a service, plus a disservice to the breed. Judges started to recognize the Bernese Mountain Dog as a very showy, good dog, but the public also saw him. That was almost a disservice because the breed popularity started to rise and with that come people who do indiscriminate breeding. That was happening before that, but not as much as afterwards.

Carolyn: I was asked by a judge one time why our dogs looked so different from many other Berners. At that time, we had Pace, Chip and Chantilly Lace, Winners Dog, Winners Bitch and Pace was the Breed. I told the judge the next day that I had found an answer to his question. I said, "Remember the dog you placed fifth in your Open Dog class?" He said, "Yes." I said, "And the bitch you placed sixth out of six?" He said, "Yes." I said, "They bred them last night." That's the reason. People say, "You have a Bernese Mountain Dog and I have one, so let's breed them and we'll have Bernese Mountain Dog puppies." That's not the way it should be. The popularity has not leveled off yet. It is continuing to rise.

Bob: Not drastically, but it is still on a rise. There are more and more litters every year. It's not taking a jump like the Cockers and Beagles did, where they were going along like we are and then all of a sudden they shot straight up in popularity.

Will you describe your interpretation of the perfect dog of this breed?

Carolyn: Bob can tell you that better than I can. I get aggravated with him because he can see things that I can't see until we rewind a tape and put it on slow motion and then I see it, but he can see it at the time.

Bob: We do not believe that bigger is better. I have seen some very excellent large dogs that were as good as some of these medium-sized dogs. I do not believe that the breed is Newfoundland size. They should be medium-sized, 26 inches at the withers for the males. I've heard some people talk about 150-pound dogs. Most males should be 100 to 110 pounds at the very most, if they are weighed accurately.

Carolyn: The most Pace every weighed was 103 pounds.

Bob: He carried a very profuse coat and looked like he was much heavier. Where it gets chilly, Mountain Dogs have to have coat.

Pacer's wall.

Carolyn: I like to be able to look at a dog of any breed and be able to say, "That's a male. That's a female." I want the females to look feminine.

Bob: You don't want to have to check underneath to find out if they are male or female.

Carolyn: Cita was a big girl, but she was still a very feminine Bernese Mountain Dog. When you looked at her, you knew she was a female. She carried a lot of coat, and I don't think she was nearly as big as a lot of people thought she was.

Bob: She wasn't one of our dogs, but belonged to a friend of ours. The breed itself is elegant. The males are elegant. Markings are very important. The standard calls for certain markings. You don't want a bald face. The tan should reach the corner of the lip, preferably.

Carolyn: We have sold dogs as pets that I know other breeders would have sold as show quality. They are a tricolor dog and the standard says they should have white on their feet. We have sold puppies that have had practically no white on the feet as pet puppies, and yet there are many in the ring that have no white on their feet. One time I asked someone if they had bought their dog as show quality. They said, "Of course." I thought, "I wouldn't have sold it as show quality." I don't want anyone to go up to someone with one of our dogs and ask if they bought the dog as show quality. It's okay if they say, "No, I bought it as a pet, but I wanted to find out what it was like to show." Maybe I am too particular sometimes. The dogs can be gorgeous structurally, but the standard does call for a tricolor dog.

Why do some dogs look good standing and posing, but not so good when moving?

Bob: There is not a dog alive that a good handler can't stack and make it look excellent. A handler who knows what he/she is doing, and knows how to work the bone structure of the dog, can get any dog to stand and look powerful, elegant and perfect for the breed.

Carolyn: Any dog?

Bob: Well, most any dog. There is always the exception to anything you say. The dog has to take that first step and if they are not sound they will break down. One thing we preach at our classes is that it is not a horse race in the ring. You show soundness by allowing the dog to get maximum extension and maximum reach, but it's not who gets to the finish line first. A lot of judges are going to what we call

the "death walk," which is a fast walk for the handler but a slow trot for the dog. For a handler, that's a death walk, really. There is where the dogs will break down, and that's where you will see the faults, because they will pop out like neon signs.

Carolyn: More judges are saying, "Slow down."

So a slow trot will show more weaknesses than a fast one?

Bob: Oh, yes.

Carolyn: A fast trot will hide a lot.

Bob: Because they tighten their muscles up and are running on muscle, not structure. There are exceptions. Afghans are coursing dogs and are meant to go 60 miles an hour, and the Salukis, but they are in an entirely different world from our working dogs, like the Saint Bernards, the Akitas and even some of the herding dogs, the Shepherds, which like to play the horse race sometimes. You slow them down. You never saw Jimmy Moses taking the dogs wide open in Group. It was slowed down, controlled, and the dog was under control so he had extension, but it's not a horse race. A lot of people make a mistake in that. We preach that in our classes, and try to get people to show the dog as it looks its best.

Aren't a lot of judges putting up this flying trot and extreme sidegait?

Bob: In certain breeds, yes.

Carolyn: Certain judges do in our breed, too.

Bob: Oh, yes. A novice person doesn't have the knowledge to know what the judges are looking for like the handlers do or the breeders who show a lot. You change your pattern for each judge. On Saturday you might show your dog one way, and on Saturday you would show the same dog entirely differently to another judge. One day you might be fifteen out of fifteen, and another day you can be first out of fifteen.

Do you videotape a lot of your dogs?

Bob: Yes. We have drawers full of them that we've taken at the shows or training arenas or the backyard. We have indoor/outdoor rings in the training arena up there. When you slow down the VCR, you can see a lot of things. No dog is perfect. All dogs have some weaknesses somewhere. You don't want to say, "Judge, look at this bad front." You want to say, "Look at this good rear." We are using the videotaping in our classes for obedience, and the obedience people are very ecstatic over it, because they can see where they moved their hand for a double command, and they didn't even know they had moved it. If you try to explain to them what they did verbally, they will say, "I never did that." If I have them on videotape, a picture is worth a thousand words.

How should a dog move in the front and from the side?

Bob: The main thing from the side is reach and balance. They should be clean going away and clean coming back, as far as structure. They shouldn't cross over. The Bern is not a Bulldog in front, and should be very clean. They are not an overangulated dog like the German Shepherds, because they can be used for carting and are a more square dog.

How about going away from you at a slow trot?

Bob: They should be parallel, depending on the speed. The faster they go, the more they will come in towards the centerline. They should not cross in the rear, and the hocks shouldn't hit.

Carolyn: The toes should be pointed straight ahead. From the rear, you will actually see a lot of dogs standing with their toes pointing out. The hocks will be fine. It's the feet they are turning out. They should be straight.

Bob: All breeds should come up a little bit so you can see the pad. They shouldn't have their feet flat on the ground and never bring the pad up. To follow through on the rear should give you partial pad. The main thing is balance. You see a lot of dogs where the front and rear assemblies are not working together.

Carolyn: I put an ad in the Annual and had pictures of Pace, Tie and

Cruiser moving, and a puppy, although we didn't do so well getting the puppy picture. They were almost identical in movement down through those generations.

What are you looking for in the head of a Berner?

Carolyn: I'm not looking for a Collie home with snipey nose. I want a substantial head. I also don't want a Saint Bernard head with a really broad backed skull.

Bob: We do want a definite stop. A lot of them are becoming more like Collies where the stop is not defined. The males should definitely have a stronger head.

How would you describe the eye, how it is set, and the ear and earset?

Bob: One of the problems creeping into the breed is light eyes. They should have a dark eye, but there are some really bright orange eyes now. We like a dark eye, not bulging, and set well in. Some of the problems are coming from the dogs that are being imported.

Carolyn: Yes. They won't tell you if the grandfather of the dog you are importing had light eyes. You don't find it out until it starts cropping up in your line.

Bob: We just had a discussion in our training building the other night. The people from England are getting very disturbed with some of the dogs they are getting from the United States. They are not getting quality dogs. By the same token, who is to say we will get top quality dogs when we import them? Are you going to send your best stock to Europe, Japan or England? Are they going to send their best stock to us? The answer is obviously that they won't and we won't.

When we started showing Bernese, we were not known in the breed, even though we were known in the dog world. With the three of us showing, Bobbie, Carolyn and myself, all of a sudden there were three handlers in the ring. The dogs were trained before they went into the ring, they were clean and groomed properly. There isn't that much grooming to be done on a Berner, but they all get these little tufts behind their ears that need to be trimmed, and their toenails need to be cut.

Carolyn: You'd be surprised how many times you go into the ring and hear nothing but click, click, click. To me, that's disturbing.

Pacette.

Bob: Nowadays, the nonprofessional handler is doing much better in the Bernese ring. They're watching others and you can learn a lot by watching other breeds. You don't have to just watch Bernese. Watch the handlers in the Groups. Learn to present your dog well. It is getting very expensive to go to shows. If you go to a four-show weekend, you are dropping a few hundred dollars.

Carolyn: Especially if you have two or three dogs you want to show.

Bob: That's in addition to your cost for traveling and your accommodations, and other expenses. It is getting very expensive. I'm Scotch-Irish and I like to win, so we don't show until the dogs are ready. We wait until they are not only ready physically, but mentally, and they are trained. That way, when we go into the ring, we hopefully have an edge and the dog is ready to move.

Carolyn: We sold one puppy and the gal was very anxious to show her. She brought her out when she was six months old for me to see, and I said, "Let's look at her again in six more months." When she was a year old, we said, "How about next year?" When she was ready to go out, she finished her championship in a couple of weekends. She was ready. She was mature.

Bob: She was very slow maturing. The dogs are just like people. Some of them can win from Puppy class and others are slow to mature. Every dog is different, and male or female makes no difference.

It sounds like you raised the standard for breed showing.

Bob: I hope Pacer did a little bit of that.

Carolyn: Very definitely. Before that, they showed very much European style where people walked into the ring and just stood there. That was it. Of course, everyone was upset when Pace did all the winning because he was handled.

Bob: Yes, he was handled by our

Ch. Ava (Advance Warning), BOS 1991 National Specialty from Veterans.

daughter and the two of them clicked. He knew exactly what she wanted, and she knew what she could ask him to do. They had that understanding. She developed her own pattern with him, which she has not really done on other dogs she's had shown. He was shown two ways: 100 percent show, or relaxed. You never saw him just sitting around. He would stand in this living room for ten minutes in a show pose. When she put him in the pose, he would stay there. It was training that did a lot for it. There are really three worlds. There is the Breed world, then the Group world, and from there the Best in Show world. Each level is more demanding of both dog and handler, and more nerve wracking. As you work up, you get a taste for a Group One, a taste for a Best in Show. Your adrenaline rises and it goes straight to the dog. They feel it, and some dogs love it. The higher up you get, the dog will come right up with you.

Carolyn: The worst show I was at was after three straight Bests in Show. At the fourth show, I was a nervous wreck. I asked Frank Oberstar, who has something like eight straight Bests in Show on his Maltese, "Does it get any easier?" He said, "No, it gets harder." You are so tense, wondering if you are going to do it again. We took a Group Two that day, not Best in Show, and so we could go home earlier.

Are missing teeth a problem in the breed?

Bob: There was more of a problem years ago. It's still there, and bites are a problem. The gene is still floating around.

How many points would you assign to the head, if the whole dog were rated on a point scale of 100?

Bob: I am more a movement person and keep pushing soundness. I'm not a licensed judge, but I've judged puppy matches, and so forth. In fact, we are doing one on Memorial Day. These are working dogs and they have to be able to move, which means they have to be sound in leg and body. If the head is a little bit wider or narrower, that does not affect their ability to work as cattle dogs, or their ability to be used for carting. It's more a beauty thing than a functional one. I like a good sound head, and a good sized head on the males with a good stop, a wide muzzle, but if I have to have one or the other, I would rather have soundness than a perfect head. I like both, but I like soundness first.

Carolyn: In some breed standards, they give twenty percent for the head and fifteen percent for something else. I don't see how they can really do that. Someone from the Collie breed said that the judging should begin and end with the head. They are a head breed, but they also are a herding dog and they can't herd sheep on their heads.

Bob: We look at the total dog. The total dog is more important than any one item on a dog. Carolyn and I do not always agree on everything, but on that we would agree 100 percent, that it is the total dog. It has a nose, a tail, and everything in between is that total dog. The head itself is important, but to us it is not THE most important thing of the total dog.

Carolyn: I wouldn't even know what to say as far as a percentage.

Bob: We don't think along those lines. Heads are more important in some breeds than in others.

How important is pigment, and would you breed to a dog that had any missing pigment?

Bob: They have to be black.

Carolyn: There is a bi-colored Bernese Mountain Dog that is just tan and white. It's a disqualification. A blue eye is a fault and also a disqualification. We don't get things like incomplete eye rims and things like flesh colored noses. We don't have those problems.

Is a tri with brown leather a disqualification?

Carolyn: You are talking about the nose, and that's not a disqualification, because I don't think I've ever seen a Berner with a brown nose.

How about winter nose?

Bob: We don't have that too much.

Should the chest come to or below the elbow?

Bob: At least to the elbow, and it really should be below the elbow.

How important is coat to winning in the ring?

Bob: It is important. The judges love a bald dog because they can see everything. As far as coat is concerned, if you don't want the profuse coat of the Bernese Mountain Dog, then go to another mountain breed. There are four breeds.

Carolyn: Go to a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog.

Bob: There is the Bernese Mountain Dog, the Greater Swiss …

Carolyn: The Alpenzeller and the Interbucher.

Bob: People sometimes wonder where all the problems in our breed came from. My belief is that all these dogs started way back as one dog and became the four different breeds, but they all came from the same genes to begin with. Once in a while a gay or corkscrew tail will pop up, or a tighter coat. People will say, "Where did it come from?" It's back there, maybe way back there, and Mother Nature is still the boss.

Should champions be specialed, and does making the Top Ten or Twenty mean anything?

Carolyn: Not necessarily.

Bob: All champions should not be specialed. There are a lot of dogs that are worthy to earn their championships, but they don't have that little extra something to carry them into the Group ring to do Group winning. There are various reasons for that. Most of it is attitude, and not necessarily structure. If you special a dog that doesn't have a chance of winning in the Group, you are wasting a lot of money. There are a lot of finished dogs in all breeds that will never see the Group ring, and they shouldn't ever see it. They are not of that caliber.

We feel that being in the Top Ten or Twenty is an honor and privilege that proves out any breeding program.

Carolyn: We've had dogs in the Top Ten since 1982. There have been at least one or two, if not more than that, and we have sometimes had as many as four or five in the Top Twenty.

Is judging fair?

Bob: In most cases it is very fair. No two people will agree on interpreting a standard, and judges will have their own opinions, which sometimes may not be what you think is right.

Carolyn: And they have their own priorities on what they feel is important.

Bob: A person who has raised

Great Pyrenees may be very strong on hearing, because a lot of Pyrs are deaf. It's a major problem in the breed, so he wants to check your Bernese out to make sure he can hear. If your dog doesn't respond to a sound or something, the judge may not give him any points. Another dog that cocks his head and looks up brightly. The judge doesn't really know if that dog can hear or not, but since it is a problem in that judge's breed, he or she checks your breed for the same problem, and the judge may lean towards the dog that responds better.

There are a lot of interpretations as to what the breed means in the standard. Even if you read an article in the daily newspaper, each person will read something a little different into that article.

Would you rather show under an all-breed judge or a breeder-judge?

Carolyn: All-breed.

Bob: The all-breed judges tend to look at the total dog. The breeder-judges could look more at specific parts of the dog. Breeder-judges are more knowledgeable and should be the best. The breed is still relatively new and there are some breeder-judges who have not done a lot of Group winning.

Carolyn: There are some who haven't done a lot of breeding, either.

Bob: You are right.

Carolyn: They may have a tendency to focus on an attribute of their own bloodlines or a problem they may have with their own bloodlines.

Bob: They may look at the dog with tunnel vision and only see one part of the dog. They may be head hunters or size hunters.

Is some judging political?

Carolyn: There is probably some, but not as much as there was fifteen years ago. Of course, some people will say that's because we do a lot of winning, but I don't think it is because we know the judges, even though after 35 years, you are going to know a lot of them. They were in the ring showing their dogs at the same time we were showing ours.

Bob: I've had some of my good friends give me good wins, and I've had them dump me colder than an ice cube. I can't see that that is political. To the novice, a lot of things can be construed as political when it's not. It's just human nature and a little bit of common sense in the ring.

Does advertising influence judges?

Carolyn: It pays to some extent because it gets the dog's picture out. I think it is all right to do a limited amount of advertising. You certainly can't say it hurts. How many pictures do you see of Jimmy Moses and all the breeds he is handling now?

Bob: Advertising must help and must work or the major magazines would not be in business. If it doesn't work, why would they be in business?

How do you train your puppies and at what age?

Carolyn: We start them at three or four weeks of age. They do great baiting with a little bit of hamburger from your finger tips, and they will stack up really pretty for that. That's how we get some nice pictures, too. They will stretch out for that hamburger. We let them drag a leash around at about four weeks, and at five weeks try to convince them they should move along with us. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. If I have a dog that is going to a home where I know it will be walked on leash, I try to have it basically leash broken by the time it leaves. Sometimes I don't, but it depends on the weather, too. It is easier to do in the summer than in the winter when we have four or five inches or sometimes a couple of feet of snow.

Are your training areas covered?

Carolyn: Our training arena is a 40 by 60 building with a cement floor and it is heated – if we can get up there. (laughter)

Is it ever appropriate to take a dog anywhere off-leash?

Bob: No. You don't really have to take them off-leash. If you want to go to a park and take them off-leash for exercise, that's one thing. If you are taking them for a walk around the block, or around a shopping center, you never know what is going to happen. Even a well-trained animal can break away from you under certain circumstances. If another dog comes up, if your dog is off-lead, you can't get him back to protect him. If a dog is off your property and out in public, it should always be on leash.

What advantages are there in having a handler show your dog?

Carolyn: You have the advantage of the handler knowing which judges like which types of dogs. There are different types of Berners. In the long run, it will save you money to enter under judges who will put your dog up, than to enter under every judge who comes along, some of whom may not put your dog up.

Bob: A handler should be able to present your dog in a different light than somebody who does not have that experience.

Carolyn: Our biggest thrill is when novice people come to us to help us train their dogs and go into the ring and win. They come back thrilled to death that they beat the top handler in that breed. They didn't think they could ever do it, but anyone can do it, providing they have the physical attributes to do it.

Bob: You have to spend time working at it. It doesn't happen automatically. There is no quick fix. You have to learn the hard way. Go to the shows and watch the handlers.

Carolyn: People call and ask how many classes it will take before they can take their dog into the ring. It depends on what kind of rapport the person wants to have with his/her dog. We have people who have been coming to our classes for 30 years with different dogs they are training.

Bob: The best compliment you can give a handler is to say he/she has a beautiful set of hands. The minute the person touches the dog, there is immediate communication. In using a handler, you are paying for a person's years of experience in learning to show dogs all over the country. Once a rapport is established, a dog will literally die for its handler, because they have an instant rapport. The handler knows what to do to help the dog.

Are your breedings natural or controlled?

Carolyn: They are very definitely controlled. The bitches are muzzled, held and controlled. After they are tied, we take the end of the lead that is attached to the bitch's collar and put it underneath her belly and hold her up underneath her belly. We have control of her neck and of her loin. She is not going to go anywhere. It is great for the obstinate bitch that decides it isn't so much fun after all.

Bob: What got us going on this was a Collie that had just taken Best in Show. He was used for breeding.

There was a good breeding, they made the tie and he made the turn and the bitch sat down. That dog was never again able to breed another bitch. That locked into our minds that the breedings have to be under control. I want to protect both the dog and the bitch.

Carolyn: Here is a picture of how it goes. This is the leash, and it is looped under her belly.

I see. It goes around the side of her. I am glad you showed me the picture, because I was having trouble visualizing it.

Carolyn: She can't sit down. She can't go anywhere.

That's great. Maybe you should manufacture something that is all set up for that.

Bob: It is very simple.

Have you ever refused to service a bitch, and why?

Carolyn: Yes, we have. It may be the bloodlines are not compatible. We may not feel a bitch is of breeding quality. Unless a dog has been injured, if it isn't good enough to be shown, it isn't good enough to be bred. In some areas, it is harder to show than it is here, because there are so many shows around here.

Bob: If a dog is not perfect structurally, but is intelligent and has done well in the obedience ring, we would weigh that in our decision.

Carolyn: It may be a bitch that is smaller than what her bloodlines indicated, and yet she is nice in every other aspect. I would probably breed to her, even if she wasn't shown because of her size, if what is behind her is of proper size. If she threw very small puppies, I would certainly suggest not breeding her again. You want to try to correct any faults you see in a dog.

What faults would keep you from breeding a dog?

Bob: Any of the disqualifying faults, bad bites, light eyes or an extreme structural fault. I would not breed to too fine of bone. I would not touch a history of bad temperament with a ten foot pole, or if the dog itself was not of sound temperament. Each dog has to be evaluated on its own merits. When there are too many things wrong, you can't help. If a dog came in that had good head, good topline and good front, but its hindquarters needed help, and if my dog was strong in hindquarter, then I would breed to that dog, if I thought we could help. If it had a bad front, bad topline, bad rear and bad bite, there would be no point. The stud dog can only do so much. We have a very strong line, but even that can only do so much to improve another line. If the puppies don't turn out, it's always the male's fault. The stud gets blamed for everything.

Carolyn: "The Tale of the Stud Dog" is a very long poem. Of course, if the dog wins, it is all because of the bitch. (laughter)

How many litters should a bitch have, and what is the youngest and oldest you would breed a bitch?

Carolyn: It depends on the bitch's physical well being. You can't have as many C-sections as you would natural whelpings. A very respected veterinarian who works with fertility said that he whelped seven consecutive litters, all by cesarean on the same bitch. Quite a few members of the club were very upset about that, because it did not make the breeder sound like a very responsible person. That's a little bit excessive.

Bob: You would not start breeding a bitch until she was about two years of age, and if you breed twice and then lay off one season, the latest you would breed her is five or six years of age. There is only two or three years the bitch is able to produce for you. The main thing is the health of the female.

Do you help your bitches whelp?

Carolyn: Yes. I want to know what is going on, and I also keep track of when the bitch has them and what sex they are. It is all written down. You want to keep track of it in case there is too long of a delay between puppies so you know if there is any problem. You can have problems. The bitch may have a twisted uterus. I also call a vet and put him on notice that we are whelping a litter of puppies in case I need his help, and the bitch goes in for a clean out shot.

Do you supplement-feed very young puppies?

Carolyn: I supplement if I have to with Esbilac and I use a feeding tube. It is much easier, especially if you have a large litter of puppies. Dream had a litter of six puppies and she did beautifully. Two and a half weeks later, Dinah had a litter of one, which she decided wasn't worth bothering with and she wasn't going to take care of the puppy. She'd had a litter of nine last summer and I guess anything less than that wasn't worth it. I put her puppy on Dream to nurse. Five days after he was born a friend's bitch had a litter of puppies by C-section, and the bitch died on the operating table. She had nine puppies. They were going to bottle-feed. That lasted for 24 hours and one puppy died. She called and said, "Do you think Dream might take some of my puppies?" They brought out the eight surviving puppies and we put them on Dream one at a time and she accepted all eight of them. She was nursing her six, Dinah's one and Molly's eight. She was nursing fifteen puppies.

Bob: For five days, until we weaned the oldest ones off her. We started supplementing very quickly. Her litter was in there, the one puppy was in here, and the eight puppies were in the kitchen, so she went from place to place to nurse. She was great!

Bob: All eight of the orphan puppies lived. It was unreal.

Carolyn: Everybody made it.

Bob: It went across on Internet and was in the parent club magazine.

Carolyn: Here is a picture with her six, and this is the one and only, and here are the eight.

That's really wonderful.

Bob: Yes, she took care of all of them.

Did Dream know she had three different litters?

Carolyn: Yes, she knew. She went from one to the other.

Do you normally wean the puppies yourself or let the bitch do it?

Carolyn: I start them with yogurt at about twelve days of age. That really helps with their digestive systems. I start them on hamburger when they are about two and a half weeks old. Then we get them on Bil-Jac gruel. When you add water to Bil-Jac, it is like a mush. By the time they are five weeks old, they are usually on the straight Bil-Jac.

At what ages do you evaluate your puppies for pet and show quality, and what are you looking for?

Carolyn: We start when they are born and we just keep watching them.

Bob: When they are wet you can see a lot of things. You can tell markings at birth. The ratio will stay the same, the white to the tan and the black. It will change a little bit on the heads, but not too much. You can tell whether they are pet or show within 24 hours by the markings. The rest of it as far as structure, you watch them develop over the next six or seven weeks. They change drastically. One week you may think one puppy doesn't look very good and by the next week it will be the best looking one in the litter. When the puppies are ready to leave, unless there is something obviously wrong, it is an educated guess which puppies are best and which are pets. Nobody can make that decision correctly 100 percent of the time.

Do you cull?

Carolyn: We will if we have to. I would cull a severely mismarked puppy.

Bob: Or a wry mouth, or anything major that is structurally wrong. Why give somebody else problems and heartbreaks? If it is a healthy puppy that is slightly mismarked, we would not cull that.

What should a show puppy sell for?

Bob: What people are quoting around this area right now is $1,000 to $1,500 for a show puppy. With some people, that figure might be higher. We are in the $1,000 to $1,100 range. That's a lot of money for a six- or seven-week-old puppy, no matter what breed it is.

Carolyn: It also depends on whether it is a first breeding of the sire and dam or whether it is a repeat breeding and whether it is a 100 percent finished litter. You have a little more guestimate of what you are getting if it is a repeat breeding, depending on what the first breeding produced. We repeated the Pace/Keri breeding three times.

Do you sell on terms or cash only?

Carolyn: We have taken terms in the past. Just recently that didn't work out for us as well as it has in the past. I tell people there is a waiting period for puppies and if they are going to pay $100 a month, I tell them to begin right away putting that amount away so they will have it when the puppy arrives.

Do you sell your pet pups with spay/neuter agreements?

Carolyn: Yes.

Bob: And with the new AKC limited registration. That was one of the best things AKC has done in years, to give breeders another tool to use. When you sell a pet, it shouldn't be bred. With the limited registration a person can still breed a dog, but the puppies can't be registered. It has given the breeders a little bit more control. Everybody has pet puppies, for whatever reasons, and it means the dogs don't necessarily have to be spayed or neutered, but they can be given a limited registration.

How about puppies back when you sell a bitch?

Carolyn: Not usually, unless it is a specific agreement at that time.

At what age do you place the puppies?

Carolyn: At eight weeks, depending on the puppy. Some puppies are on their own and ready to rule the world by the time they are six weeks old. Others are not secure enough to leave until they are eight weeks old, and sometimes a little older. We have to go by the individual puppy.

What do you feed your dogs?

Carolyn: Fresh frozen Bil-Jac, which is made in Ohio and available in some areas of the United States. We've been feeding that since the 1960s.

Bob: We use Purina ProPlan to add a little bulk to it. We've gone off it and tried other foods, but we like what we get with Bil-Jac. We get good coats and the weight factor is good, and the stool amounts are low, so they use what they eat. We are very happy with it, and when you are happy with something, why rock the boat?

Do you supplement that?

Bob: In certain cases, yes.

Carolyn: I put the puppies on vitamin C in tablet form.

Do you condition your dogs?

Bob: We don't start any program until the dogs are a year old. If a dog is getting ready to be shown, that's part of getting them ready. They should be conditioned, and should be in hard physical and good mental condition.

Carolyn: The couch potatoes? The dogs in the house are not conditioned.

Bob: The retired dogs are retired.

How do you condition them, or do they condition themselves?

Bob: The majority of them condition themselves. For those who are going to be campaigned, we have a treadmill and biking, and they get quite a bit in our training classes. We have used a treadmill for years to tighten the dogs up. Some people in Bernese use tailgaiting, which is taking the dog at a slow gait around the block or around parking lots, and so forth.

Do they put them on a flexilead to do that?

Bob: A long leash, yes.

Carolyn: It depends on the individual dog.

Bob: You can have the best specimen in the world, but if its muscle tone is like jelly and he can't gait because he is not in condition, he won't win. The other part is the handler versus the dog, but they must be in condition.

How much grooming do you do for the show ring?

Carolyn: They should be clean, toenails should be trimmed, teeth should be clean. They shouldn't have extreme scissoring, but the straggly hairs should be trimmed. I hate to see what I call whispies or angel wings coming out of their ears, where their ears look like Afghan Hound ears. If I was showing a dog that had that, I would trim it off. I trim the pads of the feet. A lot of scissoring can hide a lot of faults, but I don't think we should do an extreme amount. It's nice to go under handler-judges, because they know what to look for and can find the faults even with the scissoring.

Bob: You have to scissor certain breeds. Hair patterns grow differently. If there is a clump of hair that is fast growing, next to hair that hasn't caught up to it, then you have to trim it off a little. I don't consider that altering. It is just cleaning up the coat.

Carolyn: There was a dog years ago whose white was so long. The white on his chest came two inches from the ground. The owner just loved it and thought it was so pretty and encouraged its growth. However, when the dog moved, the hair swayed back and forth and totally distorted the dog's movement. You couldn't see the dog's front legs because the hair was flipping from one side to the other. The dog had much better movement than you could see. I would have trimmed that.

Do you trim whiskers?

Bob: We do, yes. Some in the

breed do not.

How important is training to winning in the conformation ring?

Carolyn: Very important! You work better as a team. If you know what the dog is going to do and the dog knows what you want it to do, you will do more winning, because it will be more of a teamwork thing. If a dog is moving out and doing what the handler wants it to do, it will be easier to judge than one that is bouncing around.

Bob: There is a lot of obedience in conformation. One major thing is the stand/stay. The majority of all dogs can be stacked to look perfect. If you hand stack them and give them the command to stay, that's a perfect picture. How can a judge see anything on a dog that won't stand/stay? If a dog is moving around instead of standing, the judge can see a lot of bad things at the wrong time. Training is very important in both conformation and obedience.

Can a shy or an aggressive dog be corrected by training?

Bob: It can be helped. A lot of it depends on what has caused the two problems. If it is shy because its environment was not right when it was a puppy, or if it is aggressive because it was taught to be that way by too much roughhousing, for instance, that also is an environmental problem rather than a hereditary problem and can be helped. Hereditary problems can't be trained out. If it is in the line, you never know when it can slip back. If you train the people for environmental problems there is a good chance the problem can be trained out.

You do both obedience and conformation training. Do you teach "Watch me!" or do you have any problems with the two conflicting?

Bob: There are about four different camps out there in obedience. As in any pack of dogs, there has to be an alpha, and in your association with the dog, either the dog will be boss or you will be boss. We believe 100 percent in rewarding a dog with tidbits, or whatever, when they do an exercise correctly after they are taught to do it. We believe in praise all the time. When they are wrong, they are corrected. We do not believe in constant feeding, however. Around here now, that is getting to the point of being ridiculous.

Carolyn: It's that "watch me" thing. The dogs are continually watching the hand and it is constant feeding. If the dog isn't being fed, then its concentration wanders. The attention of the dog isn't focused on the handler because it wants to please the handler, but rather because it is going to get three-quarters of its meal for that day.

Bob: I am sure those people have just as much against our method as we against theirs. We are of the old school, which goes back 35 years when I started teaching obedience. I have modified my way of training by adding in more reward, but at the same time, my dogs know the word "No" and freeze. When I give a command, they do it until they are given another command, and then they get praise.

Carolyn: They do it because they want to please you and not solely because they are going to get fed.

You can proof them better that way, can't you?

Carolyn: Very definitely. You can't feed them in the ring.

Bob: That's it. You bring them up to a certain level and then you have to take away the food to get them ready for the ring. We have what is called the "run through" in our training arena and people from different areas come here to go through the run through, which is taking the dogs through the exercises as you would in a regular show, but you can correct them. We've seen some dogs that were doing very well, but then they went flatter than a pancake because they were trained with too much food.

Carolyn: The dogs are getting ready to go into the ring, but because they are no longer being fed constantly, they say, "The heck with you. If I'm not going to be fed, I'm not going to do it."

Bob: Each school has to go with what it feels is right. Under certain conditions I will recommend a pinch collar. If a woman who weighs 80 pounds walks in with a 110-pound Shepherd, she needs a pinch collar. The dog outweighs her and outmuscles her and everything else. Some of the camps, however, are getting pretty far apart.

If you are doing the extreme "watch me," in obedience, what happens when you are trying to gait in the conformation ring?

Carolyn: The dog learns a different command. In obedience, the command is heel, but you don't use that command in the conformation ring. For the conformation ring, we use "Let's go." We don't change collars, we don't change leads. They will move out ahead of you and won't watch you because they were not given the command to heel. It's another set of commands, that's all. When we leave a dog on long sits and downs, they are over there and we are over here. We are not running back and forth to give them a tidbit every five seconds to reinforce the down, as some trainers are doing now. A problem is when there are two dogs, one will think, "Why is that dog getting fed and I'm not?" It's great for proofing the other dogs, but I can't see any purpose in what they are doing.

Bob: The new wave is feed, feed, feed, but there are some of us who don't go with that 100 percent.

Carolyn: Some dogs learn very quickly that if they are not being fed in the ring, they don't have to do the commands, but they will do them in the classes because they know they will be fed. They learn to know very quickly when they are in the ring and when they are not. I've never had Bobbie follow me back on stand for exam, when you leave a dog to stand for a return. The last two shows Bobbie was in, she went in the heel position and went right around the circle with me. The first time she did it, I went, "Huh?" She had never done it. She didn't do it here in the living room, she didn't do it in the grooming area, she didn't do it in the kennel, and she didn't do it the next morning. The next day in the ring, she followed me around again.

She probably heard the audience.

Carolyn: Yes, they laughed.

Bob: Both methods work. It boils down to you picking a trainer you want to work with. If you decide you don't like that trainer, you can find another one. We do a modification of both methods, because I believe in rewarding and tidbits. It is in a different time frame.

Carolyn: Ours is after the exercise is complete. Obedience work is just like conformation – go to different classes and see how the dogs are being trained, just like you go to different shows and watch different handlers. You take this idea from this handler and that idea from that handler and incorporate it all into your own style or method of training. Some of our dogs have done very well in obedience. There are a couple that have their Novice Draft Dog titles. People who are buying puppies from us are doing great. It helps your reputation if you have people who really want to work. If you produce the best dog in the world, but it is just sitting in someone's backyard, who will ever know it? If Pace was never shown, nobody would have ever known that Penny bred him.

How would you describe your kennel setup?

Carolyn: Mostly in the house.

Bob: We have a pretty good setup. There are inside/outside covered runs. In the winter time around here we can get six feet of snow and they can walk right over a six foot fence, which the dogs did before I covered the runs. The kennel is heated and there is water out there. We do limited boarding. The dogs are kennel dogs, but they are also house dogs. It is a continuous rotation from kennel to house. Everybody gets his or her turn in the house. They are spoiled rotten.

How many are in the house at night?

Bob: A minimum of about three and up to five. That's enough.

Carolyn: They are very big.

Do they shed a lot?

Bob: They shed. They are shedding right now. We have two out there that are bald. They lost everything.

Carolyn: If you bathe them and brush the loose hair, you will have less hair around the house.

What advice would you give to breeders who are just starting out?

Carolyn: Study the dog.

Bob: Breed for a purpose. Don't breed just to have a litter of puppies to show your kids how its done. Breed to try to improve the breed.

Carolyn: Study the dog, study the bitch, and know what the bitch's faults are. Try to find a dog that will complement her and not enhance the problems. Go to the shows. If your bitch isn't worth showing, unless something has happened to her, then it's not worth breeding.

Should they go to the kennel with the big winners to purchase a puppy?

Bob: Not necessarily.

What kennels do you consider the best today?

Bob: De-Li and Bev are two of the major ones on the East Coast.

Carolyn: I don't know the kennels on the West Coast.

Bob: De-Li's movement is very similar to ours, and the De-Li type is probably closer to ours than Bev's are.

Would you recommend joining a local breed club, the national club or an all-breed club?

Carolyn: All of the above, if there is a local breed club. There are very few Bernese Mountain Dog clubs. To start one is a real hassle. We just did it. Our club is now accredited with the AKC and we are putting on our first specialty in December – finally. It's taken five years. It will be with the Western Reserve Show at the IX center. It will be a four-day weekend of shows. It's a big facility with lots of parking and lots of grooming area. All four shows are in one location, so you can go in, set up and you are there for four days.

Bob: You can get a lot of information from all-breed clubs. If you are breeding and a part of it, you can get a lot of knowledge from the parent club.

Carolyn: The all-breed clubs usually have very instructive, informative programs that individual clubs couldn't possibly afford. A person should try to belong to all three kinds of clubs.

What do you think of the Bernese AKC video?

Carolyn: The videotape slide conversation one was not great. It's better than nothing.

Is there enough literature available on the breed?

Bob: There is enough available. We just got two new books published in the United States. The parent club, through the regional clubs, has information we can get to send out. There is not a lot of information in libraries or bookstores.

Carolyn: There are basically only four books. There are the Diane Cochran book and the Jude Simmons book, both from Great Britain. Then Russ and Rogers and Sharon Smith. That's it. It's not like German Shepherds where you can pick one of more than two dozen books.

How long have you lived in this present location?

Bob: For 25 years.

How long have you been married?

Bob: For 40 years.

How did you meet?

Bob: On day one. (laughter)

Carolyn: Actually, we were in the pre-nursery Sunday School class together.

Bob: Too long! (laughter)

Carolyn: So, we've known each other literally all our lives.

And you were both interested in dogs?

Carolyn: Yes, but we really didn't do anything with dogs while we were dating.

Bob: I got out of the Army, we came back home and decided we wanted a dog. I wanted the Irish Setter and Carolyn wanted a Cocker. A friend of ours who used to live across from my folks' house had German Shepherds. We ended up with a German Shepherd.

Carolyn: My grandfather raised Cockers, and had hunting Beagles before that. The Cocker had a couple of litters of puppies. She was a nice Cocker, but I wanted a show Cocker. I contacted some very well-known show Cocker breeders in the area who were very helpful. Bob wanted to show in obedience because he'd done a lot of obedience work with the person who had the Shepherds. He trained his Irish Setter for obedience, and I was trying to work my Cockers in conformation. Our very first Shepherd turned out to be severely dysplastic at twelve weeks of age. She had no hip sockets at all, so the breeder replaced her.

Bob: We've been into the good and the bad.

What did you do for a living before you started professional handling?

Bob: I still worked. My handling is not full time like Bobbi's is. I was an engineer and just retired last February. Now I'm home and I want to go back to work. (laughter)

Do you have any favorite dog stories you would like to share?

Bob: There is one about Pacer that I will let Carol tell you, because she was there and I wasn't. He was seconds away from dying in the Group ring. Fortunately, my daughter has quick sense and quick actions.

Carolyn: He had taken Group One, and she had given him a piece of liver. All of a sudden he was lying down, scratching at his head. Someone said, "Isn't that cute? He's playing." I said, "He's not playing!" Bobbi reached in and got the liver that had lodged in his throat. By the time she got it, he was down on his side urinating. They said within twenty seconds he probably would have been dead. The Working Group was second to last. We were cleaning him up during the last Group. When he went into the ring for Best, someone commented, "He doesn't seem to have quite the spark that he did when he was in the Group ring." I said, "That's because he almost died." He did end up going Best in Show, however.

Bob: That was one of the most scary things that's ever happened. Bobbi had enough sense to get right in there and get that liver out. It was quick on her part. Thank God! The most unbelievable thing that happened had to be Westminster when he took the first in Group there. That's when Carolyn just about had a heart attack.

Carolyn: I was sitting way, way up in the bleachers at the Garden, and Bobbi was handling. When I went down, the escalator was not working. I went down eight flights of stairs and all the way around to the other end of the Garden at a dead run. The person with me said, "I thought you were going to have a heart attack." I said, "So did I."

Was that your biggest thrill?

Carolyn: Oh, yes, and the National Specialty win.

Bob: Westminster is in a world by itself. It's the Cadillac of shows – that, and the Tournament of Champions, which they no longer have.

Carolyn: There is a picture of the two dogs between the Winkie, which is the Oscar award they give. Manhattan was show dog of the year and first runner-up was Annie Oakley who was owned by Bill Cosby. The second runner-up was Close Encounters, the Scotty, owned by the estate of Novic. We were third runner-up. We were in very good company.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

Carolyn: We don't have a lifestyle without them.

Bob: They have affected us drastically. We moved out here to twenty acres from a city lot for the dogs. We wanted to show, and at that time we hoped at least one of the kids would continue on. Sherri has some and Bobbi has 100 percent. We are very proud of them in the respect that they have continued on with the tradition we started and the standard we have set. I can think of a lot worse hobbies, especially with three daughters. They were able to get out in the fresh air and sunshine. We never made them go to shows.

Carolyn: They could go or stay home. When we were in Cleveland Heights, they could have stayed with either grandparent who lived close. Only one time did Bobbi not go, and that's because she didn't wake up in the morning. She woke up about 10:30 and asked daddy where mother was. Bob told her I had gone to the show. She said, "She didn't wake me up!" He said, "She called you three times." That was the last time I ever had to call her more than once. (laughter) She has always loved it.

Bob: One of the most embarrassing times was at a show. We are firm believers in using crates. Bobbi has grown up with the dogs. We were at a show when she was about two years old. She got tired, got her blanket and went into one of the dog's crates. She put her blanket down, lay down, reached up and shut the crate and went to sleep.

Carolyn: Someone walking by said, "That is cruel! I have never seen anything like that!" I turned around to see what they were talking about, and they were looking at my daughter. I just kept on going. There was no sense trying to explain it. What better place for her? No one would disturb her. (laughter) She did it all on her own.

Bob: We've had a lot of very good experiences. We used to put on a booth at the American/Canadian Sportsmens Show, which was one of the largest Sportsmen's shows in the country. It was called "the dog attraction booth." We had a lot of fun putting that on. It was very time consuming, about twelve hours a day for ten days. We worked with the rest of the dog world in putting that booth on, and it was quite an experience.

Carolyn: We met all these people with intelligent things to say. Our German Shepherd was sitting on the grooming table. A man walked up and told our oldest daughter, Sherri, that he had a dog that looked just like that. He was raving how good his dog was and how it looked so much like Dream. His dog was a Beagle! The Shepherd got down off the table, walked to the other side of the booth and got up on another table. She was totally insulted. (laughter)

Bob: Our family has been very dog-oriented for the last 40 years. We love the sport and we love the animals. That's what it boils down to.

Carolyn: Bobbi was very well trained by her two older sisters. They taught her to heel and to do the recall. When they baby-sat her, if she misbehaved, they put her downstairs in the kennel. She liked milk bones. She preferred Kennel Biscuit to Kennel Meal. (laughter) She walked on her hands and feet and never crawled. If someone walked by, then she would get up on her feet and walk like a human, but if a dog came by, she would drop down on all fours and go along with the dog. That's why she has such a rapport with the dogs, because she thought she was one. (laughter)

Is there anything you would like to talk about that we haven't covered?

Carolyn: I think we covered just about everything.

Bob: Our main peeve is the imports that are coming in and bringing stuff we don't need, and we are worried for the breed. We are concerned that the breed will go the way of some of the stuff that is coming in from Europe that is not sound in temperament. Also, the large size is getting to be a factor in certain lines. If we wanted a Newfoundland or Saint Bernard, we would have gotten one. I used to love Saints and we used to work with them a lot.

You get some additional problems, don't you, as you get a bigger dog?

Bob: Oh, sure. The bigger the dog, the shorter the life span. There are a lot of little things that crop up in breeding programs, but those are our two main concerns right now, that just because a dog is an import does not make it good, and just because it is bigger does not make it good.

Thank you very much! •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Barbara Packard

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Barbara Packard
WINEDOT
(formerly Bernerhaus)
Los Altos Hills, California

This interview was conducted at the home of Barbara Packard in February of 1998 by Nanci Manceau.

How did you get started in dogs?

I was born to one. It was actually a Borzoi that my family had, and then I have just lived with dogs forever.

How did you get into this breed?

That was a year in Switzerland that my husband – and our travels have been primarily through his business – was visiting the observatory in Neuchâtel, Switzerland where they keep the time standard for Europe. In fact, I brought a picture just in case you wanted to see what I saw walking out from the old chateau where the offices were. The observatory is back in this path, and we parked our rented car in this little parking lot out here and there it was. A man had a dog with him and, like everybody does, I asked him what kind of dog it was. After three successive yearly visits there, I decided I just had to have one, so it was through that connection.

When did you get your first Berner?

Thirty-four years ago, from a house called Chorrichterhof in Krailigen, Switzerland, Couton Berne.

While you were living there?

No. I have never lived there actually, just traveled yearly, so it gives a continuity.

So you had a very authentic dog to start with?

Yes.

A beautiful dog. Did it go on to be a show dog?

That was very interesting. He ended up placing in Group in the days when we didn't have many Group placements. Up to that point, every time he went in the ring he won, so I had that good early experience of knowing what it is like to have a winner.

I see. You get addicted fast.

Well, yes and no. You do have expectations. I don't know what it would have been like if he hadn't placed every time, but it allowed me a little bit to get outside the show ring, which is just what I did.

Did you start breeding right away after that?

We imported a female three years later.

And did that work out for you?

That's where my lessons started. Fertility problems to start with. In fact, the male was five years old before we ever had his hips radiographed because I didn't know anything about hip dysplasia and that sort of thing. At five years old, he certified, and we were lucky, the female also certified. Her case was interesting because she relaxed so well that she was radiographed without chemical restraint. This was about five years along with OFA, so I started at the beginning of OFA. Three years later the female broke her hip by just jumping off a little terrace, and we found that in fact she had not been "normal." At the time of the accident, the hips were Grade Two dysplasia, and just that little jumping broke her hip. Now we had more knowledge about this proposed breeding stock. After breeding the male – I didn't refresh my mind exactly on numbers, but thank goodness, we were not producing many pups because of lack of fertility – and when we could evaluate what we were getting, it was not good enough for me. It was a mixture of normal and affected hips, and when I got a Grade Three out of one of the offspring, I said, "Let's look at what we are doing here." Ultimately, almost every one of his offspring, if they did not die of cancer, produced cancer; so that opened my eyes early.

Is this predisposition to cancer a genetic thing?

Yes, and remember, in all breeds. The only reason we Berners know more about it is because of me saying, "What do we have here?" and of starting the open databases where we could share. Only breeds who have been able to share can have any idea about that. That lets you know how early in all this that I had the combination of a big winner, breeding experience and a desire to open my eyes to what the gene pool was.

How many litters would you say you have bred over the years?

You know, I would have to go to my records to count that. I'm not going to be adding up litters to brag about. I could also talk about the litters that I helped other people get bred. One of the things I could do was to get a natural breeding in cases where people had been unsuccessful by trying to force a breeding. So, totally, it is going to be under two dozen.

Do you know how many champions you have bred?

That is an interesting question, because I have never added it up.

A lot of people know instantly.

Yes. I can tell you that is so meaningless, because in the early days I was a part of having to ask for combined sexes to even get a major. I then learned very early what one can do to make championships, not necessarily with quality, but with what you put in the ring.

Oh, just adding other dogs in?

Yes. This is what I think may be hard for you, because I will not have the same kind of answers that the average person may.

This is very enlightening. This is nice that this can be an educational interview. Do you think pedigrees in your breed can be trusted as to accuracy?

Yes, certainly as much as any other breed. We have had what I think is an outstanding case where by cooperation, it was revealed that a breeder had successfully gotten a championship on a non-existent dog, and this was the first case where AKC used DNA ID to prove that in fact this suspicion was true. There, again, very early, I got into what do we do then. What does AKC do in the way of invalidating everything down the line? How far do you go?

That would be mind-boggling.

It is.

How long ago was that, to start with the DNA?

I'm going to estimate ten to fifteen years ago.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most? Probably the genetic end of it, but is there some person who has been more influential?

Yes. This is a remote influence. Dr. George Padgett from Michigan State started my education, and really in all breeds, the education for knowing that we can't just breed a nice dog to a nice dog. We have to look into the relatives of these dogs to know what the nice ones are carrying. They are carrying more traits than you can observe in the dog itself. The only way you can know what they are carrying is to look at their relatives. Offspring show the most; of next importance are sibs, half-sibs, parents, aunts, uncles, half-aunts, half-uncles. I've been in this breed since 1964, so when Dr. Padgett came on the scene in 1978, it was in the middle of my involvement with this breed. Who influenced me earliest? I guess it was my self-criticalness. I could say I don't want to be dealing with reproducing these anomalies and holding the hands of sorrowful owners. It is hard for me to say who influenced me the most.

Probably that first dog was a great influence, and then when you found out he had some problems?

Absolutely. Having the connection with the old country, I could find that there was nobody there, anymore than here, who was culling – if you will – or evaluating or screening.

They didn't do genetic testing then either?

No, this was twenty years before that was possible. This was 1964. I've been living with the Bernese Mountain Dog for 34 years.

Tell me about inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing. Are there certain times when you think each is beneficial?

I'm going to take a little bit more scientific view of that than most breeders will. Genetically, any breeding that has common relatives in it is inbreeding. The family relationship determines what terms breeders use. They are meaningless in a genetic sense. It's the degree of inbreeding that influences what you are doubling up on. In this breed, it has been a constant concern to me that people do a high degree of inbreeding on dogs of nice personality and winning conformation in the show ring. There appears to be little understanding of what diseases the dogs are carrying, or understanding what degree of inbreeding will be increasing those carrier traits, bad as well as good traits. Temperament, of course, is number one, then I want it to look like a nice Bernese Mountain Dog. We can do that much more easily if we locate and pinpoint and avoid health problems. The degree of inbreeding is what concentrates those good and bad traits. Does it feel like I have avoided you? Ask more questions.

No, not at all. I'm just trying to understand what you have just said.

In other words, genetically we are told that if we breed anything closer than aunt, uncle, niece, nephew that we are getting into even – and that is in addition – some potential genetic weakness that may not even be explained, such as one of the first things that happens with lack of fertility, with more puppies dying after birth without explanation. So what is acceptable?

So you wouldn't ever breed half-brother to half-sister as so many kennels do?

I'm very hesitant to make blanket statements. It is very risky in this breed or any breed that has not gotten the isolated gene pool that has more in the way of health compared to another. To deliberately inbreed on the unknown is very risky. Consequently, when I look at a pedigree, I tell people that all the pedigree can tell you about potential health is the degree of inbreeding.

If every dog on the pedigree was genetically tested so you knew, for instance, that the hips and elbows were okay, all of a sudden you would have a different set of rules, wouldn't you?

No, because that is phenotype. You need to know phenotype AND genotype. Ever since GDC was formed, I've been watching myself, making me think genotype, stop thinking phenotype. Remember how you used to cut out paper dolls and then stretch them out? I have paper puppies, and when they are folded all together, you see one puppy, and that's like a phenotype. You stretch him out and there are eight of them, with every one showing a slightly different phenotype. That first

The mature, self-confident, affectionate Ch. Lucki v Chorrichterhof CD (pronounced Lou-key). Hips radiographed at age five, receiving Certification #BMD-3. His ribbons were consistently blue, except for a Group Third (always with vibrissae intact!); with reputation as "that nice moving male, shown in the West by the young girl" (our fifteen-year-old daughter, Jane). He died at nine-and-a-half of gastric dilatation (bloat).

puppy is carrying parts of the same package gene as the other seven. Say that puppy was really nice, nice hips, nice elbows, what about the other seven? It is potentially possible to have a really nice set of hips in the first puppy and seven affected hips in the others. In another litter, where it will get a certification at twelve months old, and say that there are six of the eight that are very, very good and maybe weren't affected, even that pup is carrying a better gene pool than this one over here. That is thinking genotype, and that's what this whole effort that we have been working on for these six years: to try to get all breeds thinking, try to get veterinarians thinking genotype, instead of phenotype. You have to screen phenotypes, but then you have to tie them together to predict the genotype.

How many dogs do you keep now?

I will answer flatly, one, and then it can take another whole speech to tell you why. I consider this breed to be a classic shepherd's dog personality. In my experience – I had a boarding kennel for six years, and I did training of all breeds during that time – a shepherd's breed has needs that other breeds don't have. The shepherd has programmed in them a certain need which is to shadow, in a way that no other person requires while using their dog for help. A shepherd has to be able to call the dog and give an order, and know that dog was keeping track of him within voice distance. So, it is likely he'll say, "Oh, I want a pup out of that one." That one was like all of a sudden, "Whoops, where did my master go?" They are born to shadow a person, a desperate need, more separation anxiety from their master than other breeds. Therefore, you don't go get another dog to keep your shepherd's dog company. Its anxiety will continue when it's not with its master. So I practice what I preach – one at a time. Now that doesn't mean I don't often have more than one, like baby-sitting one, rescuing one, whatever, but no, I have my single shadow always.

Couldn't you possibly have two or three shadows?

No, but that is a very interesting question. Part of the little speech I give people thinking about coming into the breed is that apparently in a canine sense you are THE shadow, or you aren't, you can't be half-a-shadow. I have done purebreed rescue for 25 years now, as well as probably getting the majority of the behavior problems in the Bay Area; 98 percent of the cases come from homes where the Berner is raised with another big dog(s) or is left alone during work hours. This is what I'm observing. Consequently, another large dog in the family influences the personality in a way that either the one that is trying to secure that shadow position becomes hyperactive to see to it that it gets to the owner before the other dog, to the food first, out the door first, into the car first. In the opposite direction it will become more shy, retreating, handling this internally. They will be off somewhere else because they perceive the other dog as being given that shadow position. People will say, "You mean it's competition." No, it is more subtle than that. It is not competition; they get along fine; they work out their things, but from Sheltie size up, any dog that size is potentially vying for that shadow position with the original one. With Sheltie size down, cats, chickens, rabbits, kids, a shepherd's dog does okay. That gives you a summary of my little speech – number one actually – because I say, "If you know you want multiple big dogs, or you cannot take your dog to work with you, think very carefully about getting any shepherd's breed. In my experience, the Bernese Mountain Dog is on the extreme end if I lay the shepherd's breeds out in a line according to this need to shadow. There are plenty of people who do not agree with me. I'm simply observing what I get in the way of the behavior problems in dogs that have to be rehomed.

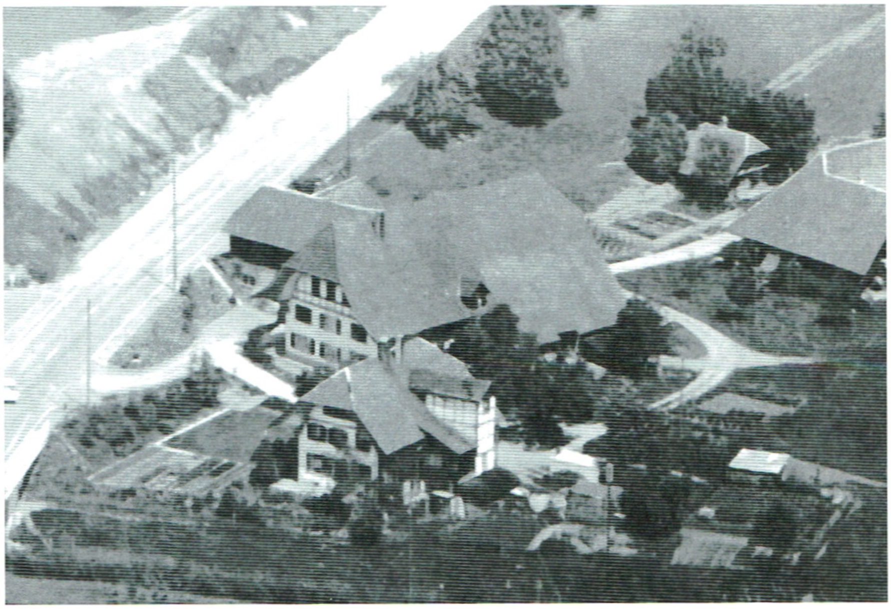
Ch. Lucki v Chorrichterhof CD.

That's primarily, but not limited to shepherds, I suppose?

The shepherd's breeds are extreme because, whatever country he's in, what the shepherd has selected for is very similar. He simply has to have a dog that's keeping track of him and a strong need to do that partnership working.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

I've owned two kennel names. The first one was called "Bernerhaus," and that existed until the other family lost both their imported female and their USA-bred male to cancer. These people essentially decided to get out of Bernese Mountain Dogs because it was not what we considered to be a successful breeding, colony or experience. We then took our boarding kennel name, which was "Winedot," planted with



Chorrichterhof in Krailigen, Switzerland/Berne. A classic barn-house combination under one rool. It is said that the heat from the animals in the barn affected the temperature in the house, also.

wine grapes on the fence as a reminder of its location on Wyandotte Street. Now my business is “People/Pet Services,” with that logo of Winedot. Incidentally, with Bernerhaus, we had those dreams that every new person in the business did, of getting it recognized. It turns out that AKC will not recognize a kennel name that has what they consider a nickname for the breed in it, i.e., “Berner.” Though being Swiss-oriented, we had used the official German name for Bernese Mountain Dog, which is Berner Sennenhund.

How would you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

Temperament is first. Soundness and type, I really want to tie together. You don’t have to separate them. You can have sound, typey dogs. However, what you call the type in the breed we are dealing with together, versus what I call the type can be wide apart, so that’s why I will say soundness, because then type will depend on the individual and what you feel is “being typey.”

So you think type is pretty subjective?

I do, on the part of judges, as well as breeders. I can tell you what I’m watching happen to this breed in something so subtle that over 30 years we are already “neotenizing” the Bernese Mountain Dog. Are you familiar with that term?

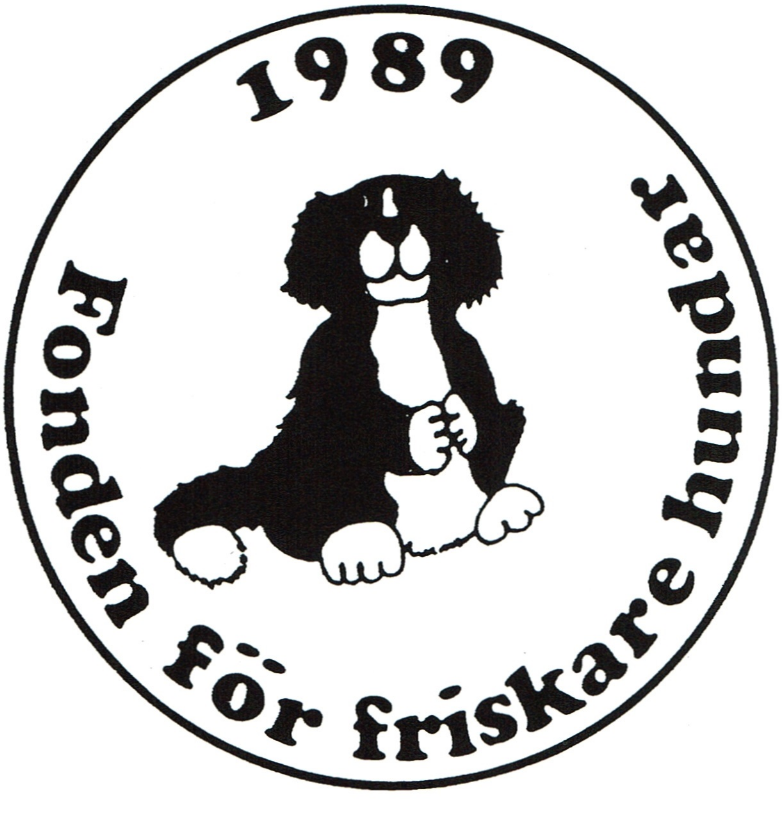
No, I’m not.

Neotenizing comes from neonatal or “newly born.”. We are picking shorter muzzles, making puppy looks in some of our adults because, unconsciously, this warms our nurturing feeling. It was ethologist Konrad Lorenz who made this comment. Dr. Marc Nussbaumer at the Natural History Museum in Berne, who keeps skulls of all breeds for many, many years, can pull out a drawer and show you what the muzzle of any breed was like 30 to 50 years ago and what it is like now. His words are, “As soon as people take any breed into the home, then they start selecting for traits that increase our bonding to pets.” Bäri, the St. Bernard who did the famous rescue work, is mounted in the foyer of this museum. He could be a Bernese Mountain Dog, but with white and tan – more tan than white – a muzzle very much like a Bernese Mountain Dog, and would fall within that standard for size.

Now you see a little more short, compact muzzle?

Yes.

Do you have a long-range goal in breeding dogs, or do you still breed dogs?



The Swedish health fund decal.

No, I have not owned a breeding dog, and consciously, ever since I really got into this genetic disease control. I do not want to be perceived as having anything personal as a reason for my efforts. This is for the breed that I'm working. It's for all breeds in fact, but I have had the in-depth laboratory of experience with the Bernese Mountain Dog. As long as I can function adequately, I will be trying to secure the system that allows all breeds to do this genetic evaluation to improve the breeding stock selection. In fact, I ran across the little written memorial to that first dog, where I said that as I put my hand on his freshly dead body, I pledged that I would work as long as I could to lengthen their lives.

How long did he live?

At nine-and-one half, he died of gastric dilatation, and didn't even torsion. That's young, since we should be expecting twelve to fourteen years out of this breed.

What is the average age for the breed now?

You can't answer that question "average," because we don't have data that isn't skewed. We are emphasizing and trying to get people to include death dates in the open database. (I try to say registry for official evaluations and database for breed data.) The data published in our cancer study at four years along, says the age of death for tumors peaks at five to eight years old. I therefore maintain that any time a person quotes the age of a Bernese Mountain Dog as being within that range they are accepting disease death as average, and I cannot. In other words, you have to remove those that die of disease from the data that you are looking at, to know what is the average age of death of the others who don't die from disease. Since people do share the trauma of accidental deaths much more often than normal final death, we have the data to show the chief cause of death from two years and under is car accident. We suspect that would be true of any large dog because by one year old the growth plates close, and the dog is full-sized. Although they mature in other ways during the next year, they are still puppies, in full-sized bodies, so people are expecting mature behaviour. That simply says that there is a difference between average age, expected age and average age of death for a particular disease. Until you separate those accident and disease deaths and have enough data to review, you can't say what should be the expected average longevity. Personally, you will hear from me that it should be from twelve to fourteen years for dogs this size – including Golden Retrievers. I kept track of a litter of nine, from the day they were born to the day the last one died, with cause of death and age for all nine of them. The last two girls each reached their fourteenth birthday, but neither one reached their fifteenth. We know of only one fifteen-year-old that's been written up and shared, a British dog. Therefore, it really looks like anything under twelve has a high chance of being premature death, whether it be accident or disease.

At our home in Los Altos Hills. This is the dog with the extreme overbite. He got his CD and TD before developing epilepsy; his necropsy

If they have a heart attack, what is that considered?

That would be considered disease in my mind. Aging deaths are failing systems of some kind which are known to happen with age.

Could you describe your interpretation of the perfect dog?

I want them to meet the standard in the visual aspects. We were very lucky when some rust-colored dogs were born in this country. This tricolored genetic marking, which is the Irish spotting, technically, if you look in the genetics book, can go to bi-color. An early pioneer was smart enough to get a test breeding of a rust to a rust and got an entire litter

Lucki the day he met his first son, one-month-old Jubel v Bernerhaus.

of them. She got them registered because she wanted people to know they were purebred – and that the genetic problem existed.

But it shouldn't be, right?

Well, this is the way we do things, like getting someone to say it's okay to produce the rust version. I agree with her because she had this insight. The standard now states that any base color other than black is a fault. The other fault mentioned is blue eyes. Back to conformation: I want them visually to meet the international standard which our AKC standard almost matches now. I also want them to remain as working animals. These are wonderful family pets, as many, many dogs are, but I don't want to see changes that would make it so that a Berner can't go right into harness and work, or go out on a farm with a shepherd and have the right sense of being around other animals. That slips if a new breeder simply breeds without this knowledge of what the background is. Personality-wise – and that's separate from just temperament, although related – I want the dog to remain what I call a shepherd's dog personality, which is aloof to strangers. All shepherds need a dog which alerts that "I see another animal around or a strange person," and does not then go and wag its tail and greet, but stands its ground. It is essentially saying, "Shepherd, come here. I think there is something unusual that needs your attention." If the shepherd has left that dog in charge, he can't have a dog who doesn't stand its ground and seem threatening; so I am not happy with the people who are being critical of that personality. Hunting breeds, Northern breeds, Terrier breeds are wonderful pets, and all of them are good watchdogs, but none of them are as protective as breeds. Dobermans, and some other protective breeds, don't fit into general categories like that. I won't be able to put your Mastiff in one of these nice general categories. I would guess that a Mastiff has more of a protective possibility there. For me to say it's a nice dog, that protectiveness has to be under the kind of control that is under full command, because a shepherd cannot have a dog that takes the initiative in any way to be aggressive, without understanding what the shepherd wants in the way of help or standing your ground. I don't care whether it is in a family situation or out in the field, when those dogs can grow up beside their master, they know exactly when that master would or would not worry about this or that.

Do you think temperament is getting too soft?

I don't want them to get either too soft, or the opposite. There are two main things as we talk about the ideal dog: What do we visualize in the way of what you see? What do we talk about when we are talking about personality and temperament?

Is there a third?

There really isn't a third thing that we talk about. It all involves behavior, predictive versus not predictable behavior, and the way it looks.

And movement would go along with that?

Okay, physical health. We've talked about mental health. Physical health I don't need to go into. You are reminding me that is a strong third. I want longevity. I want these dogs to be able to live for their full lives, which I believe is twelve to fourteen years at this time.

Could you describe what you think would be the proper movement, whether it be from the side or coming and going? A center line trot, or ...

We spent some time several years ago taking movies of our dogs coming and going, and sideways, using Rachel Page Elliott's book, *Dog Steps.* They were shown slow motion like she did, to analyze the gait. It was very revealing and wonderful, even to know what is a single track versus the other. I want the gait to be like Mrs. Elliot describes so that from the side the dog is not overstepping. You want a front and a rear that matches, that integrates. It was the nice integration of the front and the rear movement that caused the first dog we imported to win every time. From the side, front or rear, for the two ends to match will depend on how close the dog moves in, because if it moves in too much, it is going to go inside and force the front legs out, or the opposite. It'll have to be out if it's a narrow front.

Do you have a problem with missing teeth in this breed?

Yes. Missing teeth is important and it probably exists in every breed to some different degree. Certainly when you start shortening muzzles, you are going to start getting missing teeth. These are the premolars that the judge looks for immediately, along with underbite, overbite or even bite. In the ring an even bite may be acceptable, but in a health way it is not. By the time the dog is five years old, you can almost guarantee the teeth will be worn off close to the gums. Therefore, the scissors bite is important. I had one extreme case where at eight weeks old there was a quarter-inch overbite. The breeder said that there had been two other cases, same breeding, that had become a scissors bite at adulthood. The lower jaw started to grow in this dog from seven to nine months and did become a scissors bite; not a nice type scissors bite if you really looked at it, but judges didn't call attention to it. This showed a weak genetic control of the matching rates of growth of the upper and lower jaws.

Is a reverse scissor or an undershot allowed in the breed?

These are not disqualifications in the standard. However, they are health problems, because what happens in over or undershot bites is that the canines may either get trapped inside and press against the palate or are trapped too close to each other and wearing, so that by eight years old there are ridges in the canines that makes a weakened condition. I don't care which it is, it is not good. I do tell people that, at eight weeks, one of the things you may be able to tell will be the condition of the bite and to predict whether it looks like the canines are going to get trapped.

Even at eight weeks you said?

Yes. At eight weeks old you can tell if a dog definitely has an over or an underbite. You can see an even bite, but you don't really know which way it is going to go.

How about eye color? I assume they are supposed to have a dark eye color.

Giving cart rides at Sir Francis Drake KC show, California.

Ten-month-old Jubel v Bernerhaus, a lovely phenotype for head and body proportion, but also phenotype for early painful hip dysplasia and the cancer that killed him at nine years old.

The standard uses the word "dark." In a way, that was a bit of a disappointment when I saw it starting. It think it was a mistranslation of the original Swiss – I can tell you that I like the eyes to match the color of the rust cheeks. It's a beautiful, dark rust, which was translated as fiery; the "dark" word came to use because there can be a lighter, yellowish color that isn't pleasant. I've owned both kinds. For me, the deep, soulful dark brown is not as expressive and lacks a little of the extra beauty of that rust-colored eye. I'm seeing more and more of these dark brown eyes. Again, a little bit more puppylike, because in the puppy that dark navy blue gives a soulful look. Therefore, eye color to me is very important; eye shape is very important.

What shape should the eye be?

It's described in the standard as almond. It should not be round; it should not be protruding; it should not be squinty and recessed.

A round is more puppylike, isn't it? More childlike?

It is. Exactly.

If you could rate the whole dog on a point scale of 100, how many points would you give the head of the dog? How important is the head?

Is it fair to tell me what categories I'm going to be able to put it between?

Just the whole dog. If you were going to give the whole dog a scale of 100, how much importance would you put on the head? Would you give it 50 points, 50 percent importance, or ten percent?

I'm really going to have trouble saying what percent. I'm going to say that the movement, the articulation of the front and rear end and the movement of the dog are going to be more than half. So what do I have left then in the way of conformation? I will put head and expression as being very important. I would not minimize the coat. Size is going to have to do with movement. Head is important to me in conformation, but if I had to choose head compared to a matching sound body, I'm going to say the head is less important. Still, it will be very important to me to have a head that is aesthetically pleasing.

How about pigment? Do you think that is important to have proper pigment?

Absolutely, because in this case, pups are all born with pink, lack of pigment, in the lips, the nose, and at four days little pepper spots start to come. If the nose is not fully pigmented along with the rim of the lips by eight weeks, it depends on the degree of lack of pigmentation whether there is going to be something left unfinished and pink in the adult dog. There is no question in this breed, there have to be black lips, black nose, and eyes.

Eyeliner.

That is pretty interesting for you to bring up, because I have never personally seen a Bernese Mountain Dog lacking pigment on the lids. Very interesting.

Some breeds do.

Well, that would be very striking, and probably is a genetic problem that maybe we don't have. You can see it is not a big problem, but you know what? Having asked me that question, you are going to find me asking at the specialty this spring if any of the old-timers have ever seen that.

Does this breed ever have what they call winter nose where they get light during the winter, then blacken up again?

No, and my guess is that is based on what the genetics of the pigmenting is. For instance, in some breeds, you know that you'll get lightness like bleaching. You, of course, know that you can get pigment changes by the chemistry of the bowl that the dog is eating from. Therefore, I wouldn't rule that out, but I would say no, we do not see changes depending upon the amount of sunlight. Winter nose is in the back of my head as having heard of it, but it is not one of the terms I use.

I've noticed sometimes that some Berners seem to have a lot more hair coat and curly, and some are longer. What is your opinion of the proper coat?

For the proper coat, I would imagine this Berner in the Alps where it is going to be working there with the herdsman for the summer. When they first get up, there may be an occasional snowstorm. There are certainly going to be weekly rainstorms, if not daily. There should be a coat that protects the animal adequately and takes no special care. This is part of why I maintain this wavy coat has been accepted as the standard. If you think of a curly coat, and it has snowed or rained, the coat actually collects the snow and it will melt and go into the body. The guard coat in a Berner, like a Golden, is a glossy hair, naturally shedding rain or snow and dirt when it dries. That is a practical kind of thing.

So the straighter, the better?

No. A short-haired coat will tend to be straight more likely than a longer coat; so I wouldn't say the straighter, the better. However, usewise, I'm not sure why I say that. That may be aesthetics. Now, when you talk coat and some other things, you have to know there are four Sennenhund breeds. The Sennen is the herdsman who takes the animals up to the senne – that is the meadow where they take the cows for the summer, along with the dogs. There are four distinctly different breeds now, but it is my impression, the gene pool was not separated out more than 200 years ago. The other three breeds are all short-haired. One of them is equal size to the Berner; the other two are smaller. One of those, the Appenzeller, is born with a ring tail. One of them, the Entlebucher, is usually born with a bobtail, so if it is longer, it is amputated. The Grosse Schweizer and the Berner are left with natural tails. These first three were used around the animals. The Grosse Schweizer (large Swiss) is used mostly for drafting around the farm. We sometimes see traits of the three other Sennenhund breeds in our Berners. I not only see short coats, I have seen short tails, ring tails. There was a lot of talk about not showing Berners with ring tails, although it is not a disqualification. If we are talking about genetic background, it is not surprising to me that we get variations of all this until we get our gene pool more uniform.

I didn't realize there was such a diversity in the coats and the breed. I've just noticed some are bushier than others.

Absolutely, and it isn't due to supplements. There are people who have spent dollars and dollars giving this and that kind of supplement to make the coat more glossy, but I could not see a change.

So it's all genetic?

Right.

What is the ideal height of a dog and a bitch?

I do have personal reactions to this. We modified the standard two to three years ago. AKC wanted those of us who had half-inches in the standards to either increase it by a half-inch, or bring it down by a half-inch. If my memory is right, what we chose to do is increase it, so that we are now at 28 inches at the upper.

There is a maximum standard then?

It is not a limitation to showing. It's on the average, or ideally between 23 and 28 inches. Maybe that's what it is now, but that's like two different breeds for me. I maintain a 27-inch or 28-inch dog must be called a giant breed. Those are the lower limits of the giant breeds. What I'm seeing and have watched for all these 30 years are people wanting to make the Bernese Mountain Dog bigger, continually complaining, particularly with the females, that it is hard to get a big one. What I'm observing is that there is not a lot of difference between the males and females. I personally imported Arlette from Switzerland, who was actually 26-and-one-half inches on the rear end and 26 inches on the front end. I see 24- to 25-inch dogs as what they seem to be on the average. I know of one breeder who used a 22-inch

Square dancing demonstration at Sir Francis Drake KC show (three squares = twelve owners and their dog partners).

male. As I look at the four Sennenhund breeds, this seems to be going more toward the three smaller breeds. However, she didn't get just smaller ones out of the 22-inch dog, nor did we get just big ones out of Arlette when we used her. What I'm saying is that this breed most commonly appears to me to want to come out 24 to 25 inches. I do compare and think of this in connection with wild canids, and I don't know of a wild canid species that is 27 inches. The feral sort of breeds in countries where they are free-roaming are going to be smaller than that. They are going to be down to 22 inches and less, which may have something to do with survival, health.

Do you see bad feet in this breed?

Feet, conformation for me, should be practical for working. In the standard, it describes rounded feet in contrast to what we would call rabbit feet. If you do think about working in the swampy meadow between the rocks up where they are going to work with the animals, the dog should have a compact foot with real strength of the toes. That's going to be sort of generalizing, but the more functional foot is somewhat rounded, and of course, that's what a conformation judge wants to see. I do see splayed feet with unhealthy weaknesses of ligaments at the back of the foot. I personally would seek the feet that appeared to be the most functional under the conditions that the dogs are used, including carting in the village. The dog needs strong feet and ligaments for carting.

Can the carting as an exercise build up a poorly conformed foot? Will that help it?

If it is due to actual structure of the ligaments and cartilages, you will help it by building muscle structure and strength in the cartilages, but you cannot correct something that was born wrong. One of the things that I have over and over helped a young person learn is that if you have to cut the toenails of a Bernese Mountain Dog, look at the structure of the foot. If it's up on that foot and using the toes, they will be worn off by the action of the dog itself. If the toes aren't working on the ground, the nails grow longer. I say if you have to cut the toenails of a dog, please look at the structure of the foot.

But what about dogs who are on soft carpet or grass all the time? They don't wear down, do they?

I have never had a dog that was kenneled in a way that it didn't have enough to wear the toenails off if it was up on its toes. I'm sure that it would be possible in some breeds. To begin with, the Berner should go where its owner goes. If that was always on carpet in the house, or grass outside, you could probably show me one that would break my rule.

What about ears? Is there a proper earset you like to see?

The standard describes a triangular shape, lifted on alertness. There are primarily two head shapes that I see. One fits this description, I have plenty of those pictures to show you because that first dog was that kind, so I'm patterned that way. The other acceptable and winning type head is very different. There is a lower earset, maybe a little more domed at the top. Even if the head is nicely flat, there is a difference from the ears that pop right up on alert.

Both are acceptable in the show ring?

Yes. That would be very personal. It will depend again on who is entered at the time, but there are going to be people who will give as an example of nice head conformation what I would consider to be droopy-eared. I like the higher set ear.

Are there disqualifications in the show ring standard?

I should look at it again to be sure, but certainly background color other than black and blue eye color. These two, to my memory, are the only two actual disqualifications.

Do you agree with that?

Yes.

Is there anything you would like to see changed in the AKC standard?

The height bothers me.

Do you think champions should be specialed?

Yes, if that's one's sport. It is a great sport. I'd better not let it pass without inserting here – should champions be bred? That is another question. (laughter) So you are hearing me say a winner – and let's assume it's a nice dog for it to have been a winner – should be shown if that's your sport, but please don't equate winning in the show ring with breeding quality. If specialing that winner implies automatic qualification for breeding, I would be opposed.

Do you think AKC should make some rules about having the dogs tested genetically before allowing breeding?

I don't think AKC in our country can ever be put in the position of judging breeding quality. I feel they have a strong responsibility, which I have been dealing with now ever since the GDC was formed, to make available screening diagnoses, along with pedigrees, so that the breeder who is educated and wants to use predicted genotype has the information. Yes, I feel we have done enough talking to show that it is feasible to list which of the registries have information on a dog. AKC moved to include only the unaffected confidential reports of OFA and CERF on pedigrees. It is too bad that they got into listing only unaffected phenotypes, which means that some of the dogs with OFA or CERF certifications listed are carriers and may later actually become affected animals. The system they moved into perpetuates the practice of breeding by phenotype selection. We are at the stage now where we know that we must select by genotype (a collection of family phenotypes) to gain genetic disease control.

Don't you think it's better than not having them?

No, because this implies to the buyer and the breeder that the dog is cleared for breeding, which is wrong. There are other systems that do it okay, and that is a whole separate subject that I want us to talk about before we part today.

Since we are talking about that sort of thing, how do you compare the OFA evaluation to the PennHip one?

You cannot compare the two. Each is a phenotype done with a different set of diagnostic procedures, so under each case, you the owner, get an OFA evaluation or a PennHip measurement (phenotype) for your dog. PennHip is a private registry, too. It is not available to all of us, but is a private set of data that Dr. Gayle Smith gathers for his project.

But they make you sign a paper that you have to allow it to be public knowledge. When I had my dogs PennHipped, no matter what the outcome, I had to be ready to have that be public knowledge.

I would love to see what that actually is, because I think it says something that he has to be able to use your data in the evaluation of his project. However, I can tell you that I, or your friend, have no access to your report. What it does, which is good, is measure the laxity and some other parameter of your dog, and then it gives you a set of standards that say it is likely that within this range there will be normal conformation; if it is predicted to be that high risk within this range, it will be affected. The middles then (according to his published report) don't correlate well, but it lets you know that it's in the middle of the range for your breed. One of the advantages is that the way he keeps the data, it's a progressive thing. As he adds more Mastiffs, these whole parameters change from a year ago so it is going to be different now.

Now you asked me something about PennHip versus OFA. OFA makes an attempt, and has done it for 30 years now, to say this dog is an affected phenotype or not. The whole approach was to screen out the affected animals. Therefore, it became very important for you and me to know if this dog is affected or not. I really like this single sheet that was prepared by GDC to show what we are dealing with in the way of hip evaluations. It's clear that at twelve months there is a certain group that is clearly unaffected. With age, they will never become affected. And vice versa, there are ones that are clearly affected, and they will never become normal. Left to deal with, and what has always caused OFA trouble, is this middle range. This is the range where OFA tried to improve the evaluation of that phenotype by raising the age and trying to make it more definite by having three evaluators.

So when they say acceptable, borderline, or mild dysplastic, all of those are within this middle range?

Yes, in this gray, middle range area. In the European systems there is one person reading all of the films – in other words, you may have everything a little bit tighter read by this man versus the other one who tends to be a little bit more relaxed, but there is consistency throughout. The GDC decided to take the same systems that OFA had done, because that's the way we are used to in this country. However, they realized that if you get the first two people agree-

Square dancing demonstration at Sir Francis Drake KC show (enlarged square = six owners and their dog partners).

Square dancing demonstration at obedience Invitational, Sacramento, California (two squares = eight owners and their dog partners).

ing, no reason to go for the third one. The fascinating thing then is that if the first two disagree, actually the third person really ends up being a single evaluation anyway. I'm only filling you in to realize how tricky this sort of thing is in the way of statistics and data. The point is, we are now trying to educate that you don't really want to pick breeding stock out of this area, because that's where the evaluation can go either way, depending on all of these things. That helps clarify the phenotype that is done by OFA. In other words, it really doesn't matter whether it's an F or borderline. What's important is picking the clearly good ones, looking at them then with littermates and aunts/uncles. I have graphs that show you those differences of litters where there is one excellent in a litter full of "grey" evaluations versus a litter with one "grey" and lots of good.

If OFA is trying so hard for so many years to get this thing under control, why don't they make it a total open registry like GDC?

I personally tried very hard, because I had been working for OFA for twenty years and assumed that this was the next step that we would do. We brought European people over, had a gathering in '89, and we knew we had to gather data by open registry. We couldn't continue to advocate a system that was not producing better results. I might say at this point that I'm very proud of the Bernese Mountain Dogs, the breed I was working the closest with, who got 70 percent compliance from breeders over 25 years who bred only "normal" to "normal." You'll notice it is very hard for me to use the term "normal," because they aren't normal. There is some degree of normalcy versus abnormal, so I use the term "unaffected." Still, in spite of what is turned out in the way of data by OFA, there is very little percent less dysplasia being produced today in the Bernese Mountain Dog than 25 years ago.

So it didn't make that much difference?

Absolutely. Now, that isn't unique. The Swedes found exactly the same thing. They came to a point where in their big colony of Army dogs from which they were gathering their hip data, they could get HD down to a certain level, and couldn't seem – by this sort of mass selection, picking a nice one for a nice one – to get it below until they started tying those phenotypes within a family together. Then it dropped lower because they were picking a predicted genotype of what these animals were carrying. So you are hearing me praise the Berners for doing an amazingly good job. Whether that then has gotten us stuck in a rut, I don't know. We are still stuck in what I call the "confidential phenotype registry rut," and the job is to get as many people participating in full disclosure, family genotype sharing as possible. That's my little theme.

So I guess OFA would say that people will stop testing if they are going to make it public, right?

It is reported that they made the decision that it was not economically feasible because they didn't believe the breeders would buy it. I have asked, "Who is supposed to lead whom? Are we leading, or are we following?"

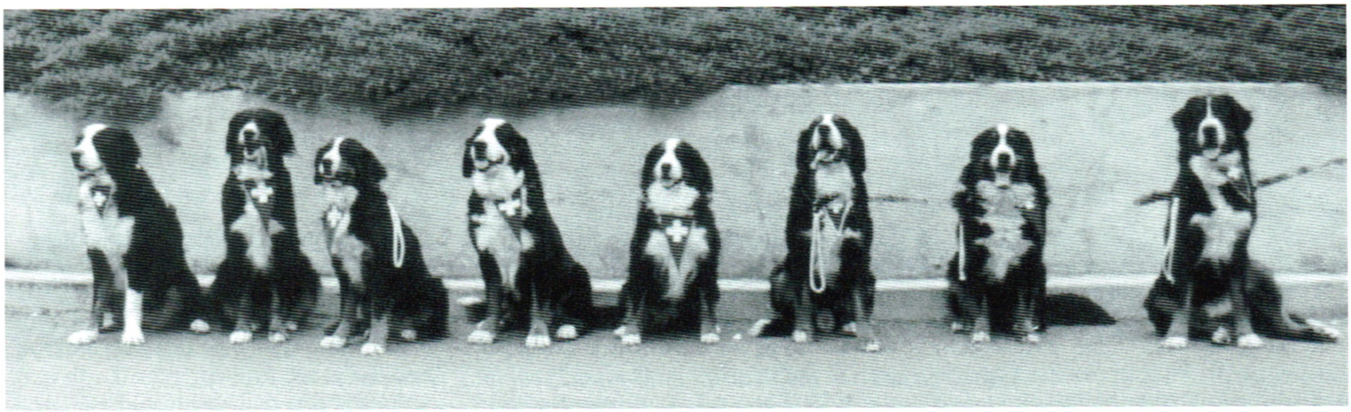
Nancy, I did notice in the '94 *Bernese Mountain Dog Annual* that you produced, that both PennHip and OFA are described. To my knowledge, you have never described or addressed GDC; so it may be timely.

You are right. That may be a good idea. We do that in the "Mastiff Reporter," to list the results of the GDC and have the blood testing.

What I'm missing is informational. I don't know whether Hoflin Publishing has given a space to GDC, and that is what I would be encouraging, pronto.

Do you think popularization helps or harms the breed?

It's a double-edged sword. By there being larger numbers, people are able to see the variation that's there that they couldn't before. It



Square dancing demonstration at obedience Invitational, Sacramento, California enlarged squares = eight owners and their dog partners).

does mean with bigger numbers that there can be more selection, if one does select that way. On the other hand, I deal with purebred rescue. Dogs that are simply placed, without knowledge on the part of the breeder of what is needed by that breed, or even what variation they can expect from this wonderful litter of puppies, who at eight weeks old look great, is a negative. The popularization makes both of each side available. I'm very aware of the quote that we read over and over that the average person entering into the purebred dog breeding circles exists for five years. That means a person comes in, does his thing and gets out because of disappointment or whatever.

Have you ever done any tracking or agility?

Yes, not agility. That has happened in the last three years, and I've not had an animal that was capable of doing it. I created two TDs. It was one of the most wonderfully satisfying things to me that you can imagine. One of those dogs ended up with what is called partial epilepsy psychomotor seizures, and we could control it medically, but it just took the edge off of the pleasure. Although my friends are right, I shouldn't use this as an excuse, but tracking is a very time-demanding kind of sport, and I simply dropped it. For the last five years, I have spent all that kind of time handling different levels of this genetic disease control effort. It was really rewarding, and I liked it, but I haven't done it with the last three dogs, which have been rescue dogs.

Have you done obedience training?

Yes. That's one of the earliest experiences of having a dog ready to do Open work. She was all the way along to glove work, when she ruptured her cruciate leg ligaments, first one, then the other. She went ahead and did tracking beautifully, but couldn't jump comfortably anymore. Right there was where I experienced the unsound animal. I then watched us discuss and successfully lower the jump heights. As far as I'm concerned, anybody who is doing that, accommodating the weakness of your breed by lowering standards, that is a shame. Carting: I was one of the original people who gave cart rides, and that's similar. It takes a sound animal to do that.

Was there a lot of lameness? These dogs have been bred for working for so many years. Did the Swiss have a lot of unsoundness to deal with?

I'm going to generalize, but I'll preface it by saying that there has been hip dysplasia shown in wolves; so these are genetic anomalies, which could have started with a mutation. Mutation that isn't reproducible is just no big deal; however, if it is a mutation that is reproducible, it is a big deal. In the wild wolf, if you are handicapped enough, you don't reach breeding stage. I guess I avoided the question that you asked.

No, you didn't avoid it. I'm just wondering. I would think that a dog that had been used as such a working dog for so many years would have just popped out much more genetically sound than it is.

My brother is a cattleman, so I know how he deals with his dogs. He is very factual about it. His Cattle Dogs are his personal shadow, very meaningful to him, but if something goes wrong, that's it. The dog's life is finished. We can end up doing that sort of solution not changing the gene pool at all. During youth, before arthrosis has set in, while the ligaments and muscles are stronger and in good condition, we can use a dog. It was when – primarily with the German Shepherds first, then Golden Retrievers – we found we weren't able to use them after three or five years of age, that we started looking into it and finding out that these were some hereditary problems. Does that explain how you wouldn't breed it out?

It's unfortunate, but I understand. How intelligent would you say this breed is as compared to other breeds?

Actually, that question I like because I help people understand that you have to search your own mind to find what is your definition of intelligence. As far as I'm concerned, every purebred has been developed for some human use. From the time early man started domesticating canines, they have done it with some purpose. An extreme is in the courts of Europe and Asia. Dogs were developed to keep the laps of the ladies warm while they sat there in these big, old, cold palaces. The Bernese Mountain Dog was selected to actually help with the work that was required around the farms of Switzerland. Therefore, you'll find that a hunting breed will have what

At the entrance to the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital in Davis, California, fifteen dogs gathered to be screened for elbow disease.

you might call intelligence about certain things, and it will depend on whether it has been developed for nose to the ground versus eyes in the sky versus what a shepherd's breed needs to know for the work it does. I'm maintaining that for the animal to be the kind of help to the human that is wanted in a dog, it has to be intelligent in that sphere. I don't think you can compare that to each other, one use to another. If it is not intelligent in that sphere where it is to work, then it's not going to be rebred, because it is not a useful dog. It's only after it gets into the home just for companionship that we might not be paying attention.

Would you recommend for someone to choose this breed specifically to do obedience with?

I would say if they are primarily interested in partnership-type relationships, absolutely. If they are primarily interested in high scores, there are going to be other breeds they'll do better with on the average. Wonderful, high score animals will depend on that particular handler and that particular dog. In general, they are going to be willing, eager workers, and want to do whatever you want. They may not worry about whether they sit square versus whether they come happily on a retrieve. If the handler really wants perfection, there may be other breeds that would be easier. It doesn't mean that there aren't individuals that won't respond, with perfection; however, in general, shepherd's breeds – just ignore the nit-picking little type things – will look at you and say, "Well, if you really want that," or, "What is it you really want? I came. I sat in front of you, and here I am." Like tracking, they are just naturals. They just do beautifully and are competing with really any other breed.

I've only seen one in agility, when I've been at the agility trials, and I thought it was marvelous.

There is a big group of people, particularly in the Midwest, doing agility a lot. At the specialty in Rhode Island in April, there will be agility set-ups; so they are moving ahead in that very nicely.

Do they ever do the Schutzhund training with these breeds?

Yes, commonly in Europe, not so commonly here. I still remember one young woman who was training her dog with good success, and she is an excellent trainer so she knew all the things to do and not to do. She felt that there were a large number of people who reacted negatively when she told them she was entering Schutzhund training, so she was not publicizing it. Literally, I don't know how much is being done. In search and rescue, which is a little different from Schutzhund but somewhat related, there are several Berners who have done well. In both cases, it depends on the handler being of the right mentality. Any shepherd's breed is naturally protective, not just watch dogging, but naturally protective. Any of those are ones that can do good discriminating with proper training on Schutzhund work.

Do you think every Berner should go through obedience training?

As a trainer, I have to tell you that I have stopped using the word "training" when I can substitute "patterning." People enter the training world and every dog of the size of Bernese Mountain Dog and of the shepherd's personality, which is protective, should be under full control at all times. There are people who have had experience enough that they can pattern the dog themselves. I use the word patterning instead of training. There is a different perception when I tell you I want you to pattern that dog, to do the things the way you want it. I expect certain good manners when I come into your house, and it doesn't necessarily come from going to "training." If you have patterned it, you've ended up with this dog simply doing these things the way you want them.

I don't understand the difference.

Well, you go to class once a week to train a dog because you go to a trainer who shows you these exercises to do. Then you come home and get in touch with me and say, "It just does beautifully in class, but it's driving me crazy at home." Therefore, I'm saying that you have a so-called trained dog, trained for certain exercises, but these patterns are not being applied at home. You can pattern all these exercises, downs, stays, sits, the whole works, in your house without ever going to a training class if you know how to do it. You go to a training class to learn how to communicate with the dog, to establish the patterns that you want. It is a psychological difference. As people come to me with these problems, I say, "We are not going to talk about training. We are going to talk about patterning. We are going to avoid the patterns that you have there now, as best we can – literally avoid them – but try to re-pattern successfully." Front door greeting is a beautiful example. Do you train a dog? No, you pattern it. When somebody comes to the door and you go to answer, pattern the dog the way you want it to do. Therefore, you take the dog's collar, you bring it around to your heel and have it sitting there, you open the door, you then allow the person to come greet the dog while it is sitting, or you see to it that you pattern the dog sitting at that person's heels, and you don't have this dog that is rushing the other person. It is something that may be hard to visualize. Bad manners in any breed this large is going to be far more serious in the way you control it than the little guys that can't do as much discomfort to me as the big one can when I come to visit. I do my patterning with dogs on walks into the town of Los Altos. I want the dog to know what to do, what you expect in the way of a behaviour pattern as it meets another dog, a person, while you are visiting downtown.

So you are physically making the dog do what you expect, then pretty soon it will just do it.

Absolutely.

Do you do training nowadays? Are you still training avidly or actively?

Not in the group training classes as I have done. Right now, I'm just full with what I can do in the way of behavior problems, so I am doing this now on an individual basis. One of the fun things was the years when we did group training with square dance music. We could entertain the public by putting on a square dance with dogs as our partners. That was a "fun patterning." We adapted the calls to all the standard basic behavior that you expect from a training class, whether you do it at home or there. The dog needs to know those kinds of things however you do it. If you can do it to music where the dog says, "Ooh, I hear square dance music," and rises up with excitement, it's great.

That sounds like a lot of fun. Let's talk about feeding now. Do you have special things you feed your dogs? Any food or diets that you recommend?

I'm going to take a general approach again. I attend whatever nutrition seminars I can, whether they are put on by veterinarians or feed companies. I'm one who has been patterned to accept the fact that you use a fully balanced kibble from a company that has a research facility where they have raised one generation of dogs after another. These are going to be all the well-known cereal companies. To supplement can be counterproductive, according to papers that have been published to show this is true. So many of us have a tendency to say, "Oh, I think it would be good if I added a little fat, or I added a little calcium." However, we already have the companies doing that. I will even steer people away from a brand-new brand that has come out that I was noticing at the Cow Palace show this month. I don't have any proof that the breakdown on that bag is assimilated by that dog, but if it has a research facility like the old cereal companies who are major producers, it is their job to do that. They are highly visible if their new formulation is causing trouble somewhere in the country. We'll hear about it by the people who are using those products.

Do these dogs need a special grooming, clipping or pruning?

I was watching with interest also at the Cow Palace this month, as I have been watching for the last few years. Bernese Mountain Dogs were up on grooming tables with clippers the same as Poodles or other "trimmed" animals. I was very pleased that at the last two specialties, there were old-timers and judges saying that this breed is not a breed that should be groomed in an extreme way; the words say "shown naturally." What is happening is they are being clipped into what I call a generic dog. A little bit more like a stuffed puppy in their sameness. I like to see if this one has a little more fluff on the ears than the other one. If there is a straggly thing, in between coats, I agree that should be evened out. These dogs were being sprayed, backbrushed, the whole works. That is not my style.

Do they clip whiskers?

I talked to people this month about the fact that my dog placed in Group with whiskers on, and I have a paper which talks about amputation of the vibrissae. They are sensory organs; the dog can literally move them. In the case of blind dogs, they are used so that the dog can actually move nicely because the whiskers stick out and they know they are touching something. Even this last month people said, "I agree with you, but while I'm showing, I want to cut them off because I understand judges like that." I would like people to talk to judges, because the ones I've talked to have said it does not make a difference to them. The owner will say that it looks cleaner on the face. I do not believe in trimming whiskers, and I would do everything I could to encourage people to show with whiskers on.

What advice would you give to breeders just starting out with the breed?

Now, I have some concrete advice. Ask for family printouts from the Berner-Garde Foundation Database, and ask for the Kin Report™ from GDC, Genetic Disease Control, because you then will see what is the family of your dog, and what it has contributed to the genes your dog is carrying. Your dog will be carrying whatever you can find in its relatives. Then, please be as honest as you can. Do you want – with the risk you see of your dog being a carrier of a very serious disease, including PRA – to take that much risk in producing that disease, and the responsibility that it takes to hold the hand of the buyer who ends up getting a defective dog? Can you face that? Can you follow every one you produced to its death?

Can you give me a list of all the things that you recommend they be tested for?

The GDC tries to do that with each breed – the major things – by the way they print out the Kin Report™. There is a little check that says this and this and this are recommended to be screened in this breed, and that will change depending on what the breed people feel is true of their breed. For Bernese Mountain Dogs right now, it is screening hips and elbows for orthopedic problems; screening eyes and recording tumors. Other breeds will be different. If a dog has some shoulder problem, that needs to be screened, too. Since occurrence of tumors peaks from five to eight years old, the dog has already passed breeding age by the time it becomes affected. We have to reply on the prediction of risk that a dog is a carrier, by looking in retrospect at the Kin Report™, to see what has been recorded with the extended family.

Is von Willebrand's disease a problem in this breed?

No. I saw a report in something public about a von Willebrand case in Bernese Mountain Dogs – and it is not verified in the database. I'm sorry I have not taken time to really validate that, because to find one would be interesting and should be recorded. How does it fit with other single reports? There is an inherited skin disorder proven to be hereditary in Poodles called sebaceous adenitis. We now have two Bernese Mountain Dogs diagnosed with this through the proper protocol. We knew there were at least twelve other affected breeds, such as Akitas. The Akita people are trying to do something about it in their breed. There is no reason that the Berner couldn't end up with something like that, but that wouldn't be something I'd say screen for. I'm just saying if a dog has it, get it recorded openly, so that it's there if we see a trend. The Berner-Garde database is where we watch for trends. If we see something happening, then we get a research database set up in the GDC to gather data until it is proven that it is or isn't hereditary.

What about thyroid?

I'm going to answer that one in a personal way. It appears to me that right now most thyroid imbalances are the fashion of the veterinary community. Concretely, a year ago, there was a thyroid symposium done at Davis where the endocrinologists met. I understand that there was great concern about the fact that a thyroid registry had opened, because the endocrinologists could not agree that the criteria that was being used was adequate to rule in or out hereditary thyroid insufficiency. I understand the GDC has had a request from more than one breed to set up this kind of registry and are withholding doing that until they get the green light from the endocrinologists. I've been following it for a long time, because it was early suspected that thyroid did have something to do with fertility problems I encountered. I have attended talks by Dr. Jean Dodds, who started with her von Willebrand studies in a very important way, and has now a thesis that many of the hereditary diseases are based on a thyroid imbalance to start with. All I can tell you is that I am keeping up to date with that, and I'm withholding my judgment until I see what the director of the GDC does.

How about the cardiac OFA?

Exactly the same. The GDC has opened one cardiac registry for tricuspid valve dysplasia, specifically in Labradors, where it is proven to be hereditary. The cardiologists cannot agree as to the proper protocol to screen for heart disease. There has been one Bernese Mountain Dog properly diagnosed with tricuspid valve dysplasia. That owner is a veterinarian who wants full disclosure. We've been hearing about sub-aortic stenosis (SAS), which is connected with the heart. A few cases without proper diagnostic protocols are put in the Berner-Garde Foundation Database, just waiting there as anecdotes. Very recently a litter was born, thank goodness, to a breeder who wanted to do full disclosure. When the sire became symptomatic and was diagnosed with SAS, the breeder had all six six-week-old pups screened, though none of them were symptomatic, and found two affected pups. What he did was to place all six pups without charge, and they will be followed and recorded in the Berner-Garde Database. People are saying, "Oh, but I've known about SAS for so long." Well, so have I, but it has been very difficult to get a diagnosis into the database, other than just a note that it happened. I have no reason to believe that any breed doesn't have some kind of hereditary heart problems. It is simply one of the places that DNA defects can happen.

Are there Persistent Pupillary membrane problems? Our Mastiffs have a problem with that.

It's not one of the things we screen for. It's not common, but that's famous last words. If it is a hereditary situation, it will become more common unless there is selection against it. This brings me around to saying, for sure, I've seen this kind of thing, but it is not something that we have been diagnosing or distinguishing.

But the PRA is alive and well in this breed?

Yes. We had gathered over the years four cases, confirmed through ACVO diagnosis. It is interesting to note that not all four were on CERF forms. It is not required that an ophthalmologist use a CERF form. If they choose to use their own diagnostic form, which they don't have to pay for, it does not get recorded anywhere. If they had used a CERF form, it will not be retrievable as an affected case, but it will go into the epidemiological data, which CERF has contributed to – a very important contribution that the GDC also agreed to provide. The ophthalmologists want to continue to know that in "this part" of the country "this breed" is having increasing numbers, and in this part of the country, it is staying the same, or different, without identifying the pedigrees of dogs. These four cases sat in the Berner-Garde, with us knowing there was no reason to turn them anywhere, until GDC established their Open Eye Registry, three years ago. So, immediately, we pulled these out, resurrected the forms that were adequate and got them registered. At the same time, we submitted information to the *News Note* for publicity, and a one-time *News Note* covered the situation as of then.

I am very interested in the effect of the Internet kind of communication. Last summer Internet people got wind of the fact that there had been a breeding with two affected puppies appearing in the litter, from a much used stud, a really nice animal. They ground out the usual Internet interactions for two months about how should we handle all of this? How can we influence the sharing? In the end, through their efforts, more relatives – maybe two more cases – were uncovered. In other words, they got in and got some people to do some eye screening. One was a nine-year-old rela-

Upstairs, comaraderie in the halls of the outpatient clinic while dogs were being radiographed to reveal if their elbows showed disease or not (the individual phenotypes).

tive which the owner did not know was blind. However, my brother's Cattle Dog is totally blind, but I might not know it. I can bend down and she can greet me, she goes past me and goes into the house. She does fine in a campground because her nose is so good; she just doesn't leave your heel. In my house that she was unfamiliar with, her whiskers let her know where the walls were; her nose let her know where her masters were sitting.

The consensus at this point, I hope, is a strong preference to urging people to register in the GDC Open Registry. There are two things that I might as well mention now that simply have to be re-patterned in our human minds. We must stop saying, "OFA a dog," or "CERF a dog." We must start saying, "Screen for whatever": "joint screen" your dog – "hip screen," "elbow screen" and "eye screen." Register the results with whichever you feel comfortable about. If you cannot go full disclosure, register with the confidential registries of OFA or CERF. If you feel okay about full disclosure, get it into the open registry where it can be linked with family to determine carrier status. It is just a phenotype on file with access only to the owner and his vet if it is in a confidential registry. This is also true of PennHip.

May I ask what you do for a living?

If you are talking about cash flow, that does not apply to my current business. I am privileged to not have to count on that for my livelihood. That has influenced my whole life's activity, because the cash flow was not a part of a decision-making thing that I would make choices on. My occupation is full-time. My card says, "People/Pet Services," and that involves all the way from helping people with behavior-to-health problems. As I work, my top umbrella is the human-animal bond. I was very active in the start of that forum at UC Davis, including international meetings. I began to realize that having a healthy, long-lived pet – I don't care what species – was extremely important for a successful, happy bond. The "laboratory" that I have used to go in-depth is a particular breed of dogs, the Bernese Mountain Dog. The People/Pet Services involves what I can do in the way of helping improve whatever problem that owner is seeking my help with. It will be medical, which will mean physical disabilities, and mental, which will be temperament, or personality, disabilities in the dog. Associated with those experiences will be projects that my husband and I have been involved in at the professional level. I was a registered medical technologist. Martin Packard, PhD, is a physicist, having a career with Vavian Associates in the electronics world. That gives us some scientific background to rely on as far as being able to be useful when we are supporting professional studies, most of them connected with somebody from Davis.

Do you commute to Davis a lot?

It is a rare month that we don't go. After Martin developed the database for Berner-Garde he was able to then meet the requirements for the all breed GDC type registry, as defined by Dr. George Padgett. He said, "We have to develop something where all breeds can keep data to start looking at things genetically." When we went to him with a registry that had been developed for the Bernese Mountain Dogs and said, "Is this it? Does this do what you want?" he said, "Yes." It is an inevitable complication for me, in that the person who is uneasy about full disclosure and how this movement seems to be marching along says, "Yes, but how can one person or one couple be really knowledgeable in so many areas?" They feel suspicious about that. On the other hand, you understand that one bit of knowledge leads to another, with other people plugging in their knowledge. After the 1989 meetings, when the closed registries said they didn't want to become open, we moved on to that next stage, with Martin as the file manager for the GDC. Maybe I have said enough about what I do?

Results of a carefully planned test breeding of two dogs with elbow disease in order to better understand the family genotype (reproducibility) of the disease; enviable conformation, diseased elbows.

Well, I'm still not sure. You said your daily occupation, and you work together with any kind of animal?

No, I have to limit my work primarily to the Bernese Mountain Dog. My reputation for saving animals that would have been euthanized does spread, and now and then I will get a request from another breed. However, since I sold the kennel, I've had just really the time to concentrate on Berners.

Of course, it includes the rescue dogs?

Yes, rescuing, reconditioning, placing. Some calls will be people wanting personal recommendations about what breeder to go to, and I absolutely refuse to get into that arena. I will give them different booklets and pamphlets with information – there are volumes and volumes of information – to help them decide if this is a risk they really want to take, by looking at what they can predict in their dog. When it concerns mental or physical health problems, it very often is an evening call, particularly the separation anxieties. There will be people who are at work all day, and when they are home in the evening they really see what they have to deal with. I spend a lot of late hours feeling responsible to do what I can to help them understand where the animal is coming from. If there are clinical symptoms that the veterinarian is having a terrible time diagnosing, I try to steer those in the right directions for professional help. With a friend, who is now in Arizona, we are establishing a base of additional BMD people who can be called to refer the person to this or that, depending on the category where they have questions.

I wish every breed had a champion such as you.

The wonderful thing about working with open registry in GDC is I have that privilege of seeing how many breeds do, and you are absolutely right. The ones who are pulling together a little larger and larger nucleus of this kind of people who want to share openly, is increasing wonderfully. Slowly, compared to what we expected. Once it was made available we really did expect that having had the model of participation in the confidential registry, and we didn't expect there to be the resistance there was to the next step which is open family registries.

Is there any thing you would like to add that we haven't covered?

One of the earlier things I did with that first dog was to go to school classrooms, and my little speech was to have them learn how to treat a dog, how to feel comfortable around a dog. I also then used the different clothes that the dog put on as something that was sort of a little bit of teaching of the young kids. This dog, when he goes into the show ring, wears this collar and this leash. When he's carting, he has this harness that he puts on. That was early, early work, long before there was the therapy dog kind of thing. Since then, I encouraged that. Through the Delta Society, I was very involved in how they started screening animals to be appropriate, because we are concerned about the appropriateness of an individual animal. It can be hard – stressful on some dogs, compared to others – and there has to be a certain basic personality.

I want to give you kind of a feeling where all of this went. Because of my husband's profession, I was exposed in the old country. Switzerland is the parent country, but he was in all countries. That means Scandinavia, Britain. For instance, the first I began to realize about open registry was in Sweden, where they literally have this. In 1988, I went to shows with them and would find these decals being sold for about $5 of our money, for the fund for health: Fonden för friskare hundar. I say frisky for healthy; that's how I can remember. In fact, it was this year 1989, that we received money to bring eight people from Europe and the USA for a gathering. That is the year in the history pamphlet that we were talking about the need for open registry. Here, for instance, in '88 a British weekly dog magazine that reports "Call for Action on Inherited Disease," by breeders and vets in Britain. In these two countries, the veterinarians are taking the initiative. In Sweden, everything goes through their kennel club, but it is a different situation than ours because almost all of the dogs in the Scandinavian countries are purebred, not nearly the number of crossbreeds that we have, and they are insured. An insurance company is going to be more health-oriented, also. For those reasons, the national kennel club gets involved in a natural kind of way.

I'm trying to give a little bit of an example of why I'm working at this level, which is the International Elbow Working Group that was established in '89 at the same time the GDC got established. We are dealing here with elbow disease being the first disease that there has been an attempt that is successful to have similar protocol for diagnosis in all countries. Hip dysplasia is different in every country; you can't really compare the data from one country to another country to do various studies. Because of all of this, we – and I say we because my husband is the technical person in all this – got involved with the IEWG (International Elbow Working Group) and I act as their secretary, so we are attending each year. This year it will be in Bologna in June, the review of developments regarding elbow disease. Well, you can't talk elbow disease without also talking hip disease, so they look for any indication that they may be correlated; there is not significant indication yet. It is something everybody is asking: Are there similar things that create the same two joint problems that are quite different joints, genetically versus not?

They don't grade the OFA on that like they do the hips. Is it either pass or fail on the elbow one?

The GDC uses this International Protocol that has been agreed. The OFA does not. There are some slight differences. The International Elbow Working Group protocol advises two views of the elbow. OFA continues to use the one view that will uncover ununited anconeal process rapidly, but may miss fragmented coronoid process. In our Bernese Mountain Dogs, the chief elbow problem is fragmented coronoid process, and it will be picked up in a second view more easily. The GDC does that and follows the recommendation that screening is done for age twelve to eighteen months. The only organization in the world that delays that recommendation until two years is OFA. If you want to test your breed and see what happens to the joint changes six months from now, one year from now, do it again, but get it in to the GDC where they can keep track of the change. Maybe there is one line of dogs that tends to be slower developing, whatever. This is all involved in trying to collect meaningful data to get scientific sorts of statistics. Through this international stuff is how I met the Bernese Mountain Dog I showed you and got this first one. [looking at pictures]

This is an article when he died, with my last request in memory of him. Through him then, this picture has been used symbolically for me. It is just a nice picture that we got made into a postcard of the first two pups he produced, which were both severely affected with hip dysplasia by twelve months old.

At twelve months?

Yes. By six months old, the one who had been a friendly, greeting animal, we took back because he had become non-functional. If someone came to the door, this dog would run and hide. When he started to go through a doorway of any kind, he would crouch and hesitate to go.

Was he dealing with pain?

We had to sort out what we were dealing with. He acted similarly when you handed him his dinner, crouching and running the other way. It took awhile to find that it was the excitement of all three things that made his hips now hurt. The doorway took the longest. It turns out that where he had been living there was a doggie door that went from the kitchen, down two steps into the garage, and outside to eliminate. Therefore, every doorway to him involved going through that doggie door and down the steps, and it hurt. This animal lived in the days when a recommended approach was to loose a tight muscle ligament with surgery to disconnect what caused the pain, and he improved after that was done. We placed him then in a family who enjoyed him in spite of all of this. His rear end simply never really developed fully. I went through weeks of conditioning this dog to accept strange people, because by now, he expected strange people made him hurt. It was a wonderful success story going through that. The female pup was one who had more pain tolerance than this one, and she did not have a personality change. Pectinotomy was the procedure that was done on this dog. Dr. Barden had shown that many of these dogs had a tight pectineus muscle and if that was cut, it did not alter their basic gait. I never myself have been able to distinguish between a dog who had a pectinotomy and one who didn't. However, it was one of the things that was making him hurt. It turns out that pectinotomies became rather popular, and there were dogs for which it was not a successful solution. That isn't done now to my knowledge very often. They both were neutered prior to a year old. This one ended up – I won't have the exact age – dying young of gastric dilatation. This one lived for nine years of reasonably normal but limited life and died of cancer. Those pups to me are the example of knowing what happened with wonderful pups like this, by me following them from birth to death, and in touch with the owners who dealt with these two dogs. This booklet is put out by the San Francisco Bay Berners, which was the first regional group. Since I was one of the founders of the national group, this is something I did write as a diary for their 25th anniversary.

I was one of the founders of the national, the BMDCA, one of the first 30 Berners in the country that got together, and the first five gatherings of Berners in this country were done in Menlo Park in Palo Alto by our little group, which then formed – the first was in 1970 – then we went through getting AKC sanction BOB, July '73, AKC sanction AOA, July '74, even though people said that we couldn't do it that fast, that we would have to do two or three of each. We did these in a way that we practiced doing what AKC would be asking, and lo and behold, we qualified with each just one. At the end of the fifth gathering, the national had qualified through us to hold a fully sanctioned point show. That would have been 1974. In October of '74, we formed the San Francisco Bay Berners as the first regional group. I could already see that health issues were going to be very difficult to address at a national level. We had to be able to be in the same room, sharing these personal experiences as they happened, so the AKC was supporting the idea of forming regional groups. After those five significant show experiences, we started being more health conscious. Now, the San Francisco Bay Berners plan to make their primary activity be in support of the Berner-Garde. This Berner-Garde guidebook talks a lot about the breed, has these pictures that are classics historically, and makes this available to pushing people to get family open history from here.

Here meaning the Berner-Garde?

Yes, the Berner-Garde Foundation. It then talks about the importance of the GDC – where Berner-Garde (B-G) is a breed database, GDC is an all breed registry of professional evaluations, some of which get into B-G; some which don't. Right now, we are having real trouble in sorting out how we should be referring people since it never seems to be just real easy. This wistful dog is a classically beautiful picture. I am going to leave you with one of the guidebooks, knowing that the masters are ready to go next week with a new printing for some updating. They are minor kinds of things, such as updating the application forms, adding a little bit in the way of diseases.

So are new owners supposed to get one of these?

That is right. We are now realizing that the Berner-Garde Foundation has to think about how to distribute this to all Berner owners and breeders, because not all Berner owners and breeders belong to any kind of a club. National versus regional: There are now 25 regional groups. Regional groups will depend upon a compatible group. In the Bay Area, for instance, there are now three regional groups. The first spin-off from Bay Berners were people who really weren't completely happy with the way Bay Berners were going, so they spun off and made a group that could do their thing. Two years ago, a group of those people spun off to make a third group. My general approach is that we should be able to deal in a generic way with some things in common, such as breed rescue, the Golden Gate Bench Show where there's a breed table to educate the public about the breed. We should be able to talk about that kind of thing together in a generic way.

I want to thank you very much for the opportunity to chat with you today. You have provided us a wealth of information.

Thank you. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Karen Ericson

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Karen Ericson
Walnut Creek, California

This interview was conducted at the home of Karen Ericson in October of 1997 by Debbie Sharp.

When did you get your first Bernese?

I got my first Bernese in 1982, so it has been fifteen years.

How did you first get started in dogs?

For years I had collected pictures of the Bernese because I thought they were very attractive dogs. I lived on a small farm and I had a friend who lived next door on a large ranch. When their old Collie dog died, they wanted to find another farm dog and I thought the Bernese would be perfect for them. I offered to help them find one. At that point in my seeking, I became so enamored with the breed I decided that I needed one too. We both got a Bernese.

Did you have other dogs before?

I was born into dogs. My father had grown up on a farm in Norway where there were always dogs, and I grew up with an Irish Setter that was the large, old style Irish Setter, and a Dachshund. Those two dogs, Jerry and Buddy, were my childhood playmates. When we moved from the country to New York City, I started going to the dog shows held by the Bronx County Kennel Club. I would spend the entire day there. It was a benched show and you could wander around and see all of the breeds, sit on the benches and pet them. I thought it was the greatest thing in the whole wide world. When I was a teenager, I worked in a boarding kennel and the people who owned the kennel were professional handlers, mainly of sporting dogs. I became very infatuated with an English Cocker. I came home from there with an older English Cocker. I showed her a bit before she retired, and that was it. I have had English Cockers since 1965, which is 32 years. I've been showing dogs that long.

Are you currently breeding?

Not in Bernese Mountain Dogs. I have phased out of the English Cockers as well. We've had a long track record and produced many champions and we've had several English Cockers of Merit. I've had some successful Bernese dogs, although I don't really consider myself a breeder of them. At one point, we had four champion Bernese Mountain Dogs, who represented four generations. I'm starting to emphasize my judging career and that is the direction I want to go at this point. My kids are grown and we always did it as a family activity. They showed in Junior Showmanship and showed a lot of dogs to their championships in Bernese and other breeds as well. Now that they are gone, I think it is time for me to be a judge.

The Bernese that both my neighbor and myself acquired were from a quality, top breeder. They were nice specimens of the breed. The agreement with the breeder we bought them from stated that we would show the dogs. I had been in dogs and showing for quite a long time before that, so I was into the show world. I owned a large boarding kennel. Dogs were a large part of my life and show dogs were a large part of my life. It just fit into the picture.

How many litters have you bred?

In English Cockers, about 20. In Bernese, just four. We never bred much. In fact, being in the English Cocker breed for 32 years, 20 litters is not that many. It's maybe once a year, and some years not even that.

Was there a reason for each breeding?

I started out with good stock. In Bernese the foundation dog that I had was very sound and I thought he had a lot to offer the breed. I felt, particularly in this area where at the time there were hardly any Bernese, he was a good specimen of the breed. In terms of longevity and health, as time has played out, he proved to be a good example.

Do you know what litter was your best?

As it turns out, the line that I had was not a very good producing one.

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Ch. Happiness' Diamond In The Ruff.

We would have one or two puppies per litter. This is a problem in the Bernese breed. My best was from one of my four litters that had three puppies. One of these puppies was squashed by its mother, accidentally, while in the box. One of the two puppies left was gorgeous, and the other was not so gorgeous. The bitch that we kept turned out to be Best in Sweepstakes at the National Specialty. She was a lovely dog with a wonderful temperament and we were very happy to have her. That was the pinnacle in terms of breeding Bernese. On the other hand, her mother is now twelve. In the Bernese Mountain Dog, that is probably like a 95- or 100-year-old adult. I'm proud of that too.

Is she the one you consider your best?

Our champion, Happiness' Diamond in the Ruff, was probably the best example of the breed that we had.

Who was your biggest winner?

She was, without a doubt. We never really campaigned our dogs. We never specialed them, never had handlers, and pretty much were all family owned and operated. We didn't put them out for campaigning.

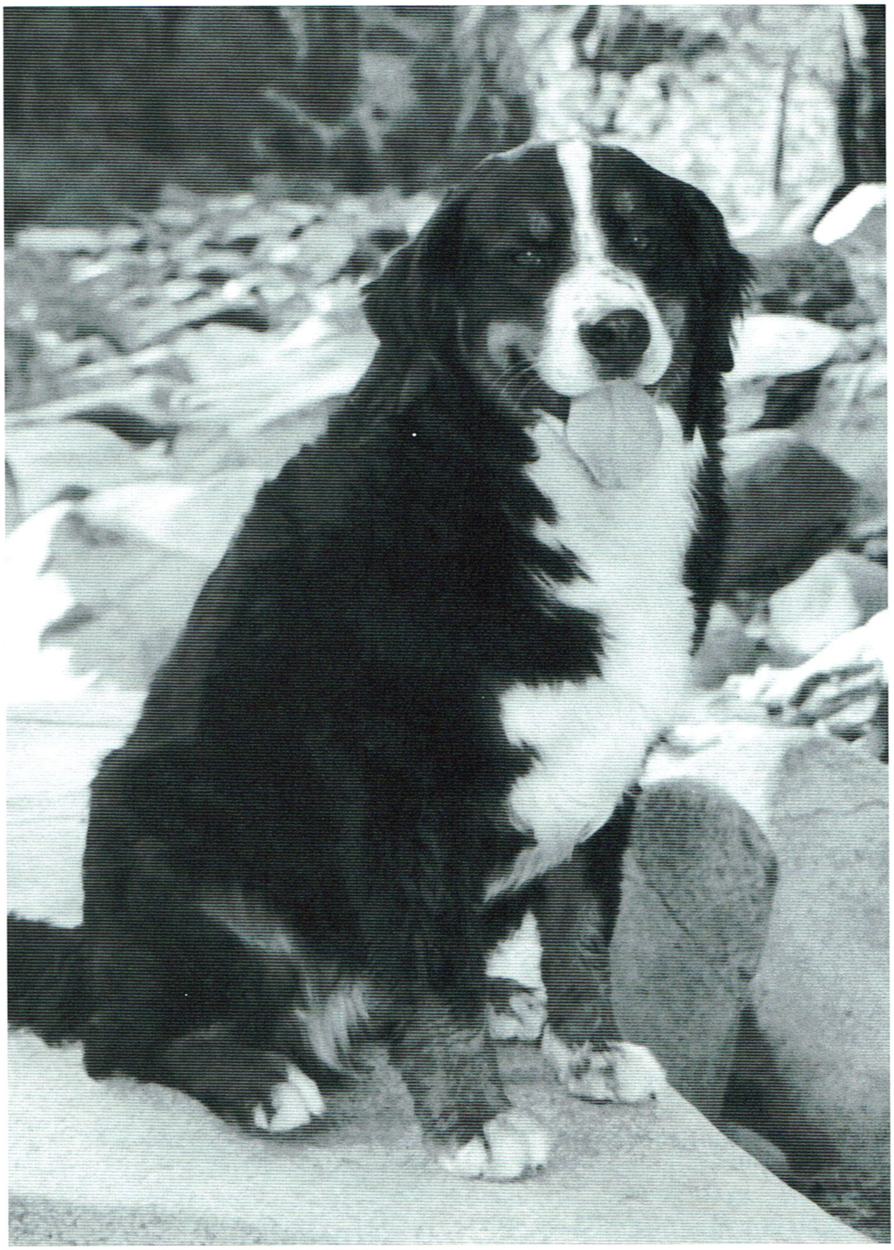
Can pedigrees in this breed be trusted as to accuracy?

Most can. We have had some issues in the breed. Several years ago when I was on the board of directors, there was a breeder who did some falsification of breedings. We were probably the first case for the AKC to use DNA testing. It was found that what was registered was not the case. There are other breeders as well, who have perhaps not been as diligent as one should be in terms of knowing which stud dogs bred which bitch. I'd say that 98 percent of the time you can trust the pedigrees. The other two percent, I'm not too clear myself. I've heard a number of things said about people who have big breeding programs that have not been very conscientious.

How have you used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing and when should each be used?

With the very few litters I had, we did some outcrossing and some linebreeding. I really don't have strong feelings. In terms of my experience with dogs in general, people are very sold on linebreeding. Some of our best litters were outcrosses. Our Diamond was linebred. It was distant, but still a linebreeding.

You need to think judiciously about every breeding that you do. If



Ch. Happiness' Diamond Solitaire, "Panda," two years old.

you have a breed type that is really excellent, that has all of the characteristics in the breed that you really want, then linebreeding is the way to go. When you outcross, you never quite know what is going to crop up in terms of recessive genes. However, sometimes, if you have a dog that is perhaps not exactly what you want, it may have some features that are strong in your line and you want to improve upon them, it's really a good idea to go outside and find the very best example of the breed that you can, even if it is not related in any way.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

There have been so many people over the years that have helped me. Denise Dean was who I got my foundation stud dog from. She is extremely honest in terms of her own dogs and everyone else's. She certainly provided me with a lot of guidance early on, in terms of the breed. One of the things that we are very fortunate to have is a number of old-time members in Bernese Mountain Dogs who were there long before the breed was popular. Some of them have their roots in Europe and are very willing to give ideas and opinions. There are several people like this who are always willing to discuss where the breed is and where it should go. Esther Mueller, Sylvia Howison and Debbie Mulvey have certainly influenced me. I hate to leave anyone out. Certainly before that, in terms of dog breeding in general and some ideas on genetics, there have been many people who have helped me. I hate to start naming names for fear of leaving somebody out. I read a lot of books too. There are a lot of good books on genetics. I was originally a biology major in college. My husband is a veterinarian, and he has been very good about helping me understand genetic problems.

Do you feel there is enough literature on the breed?

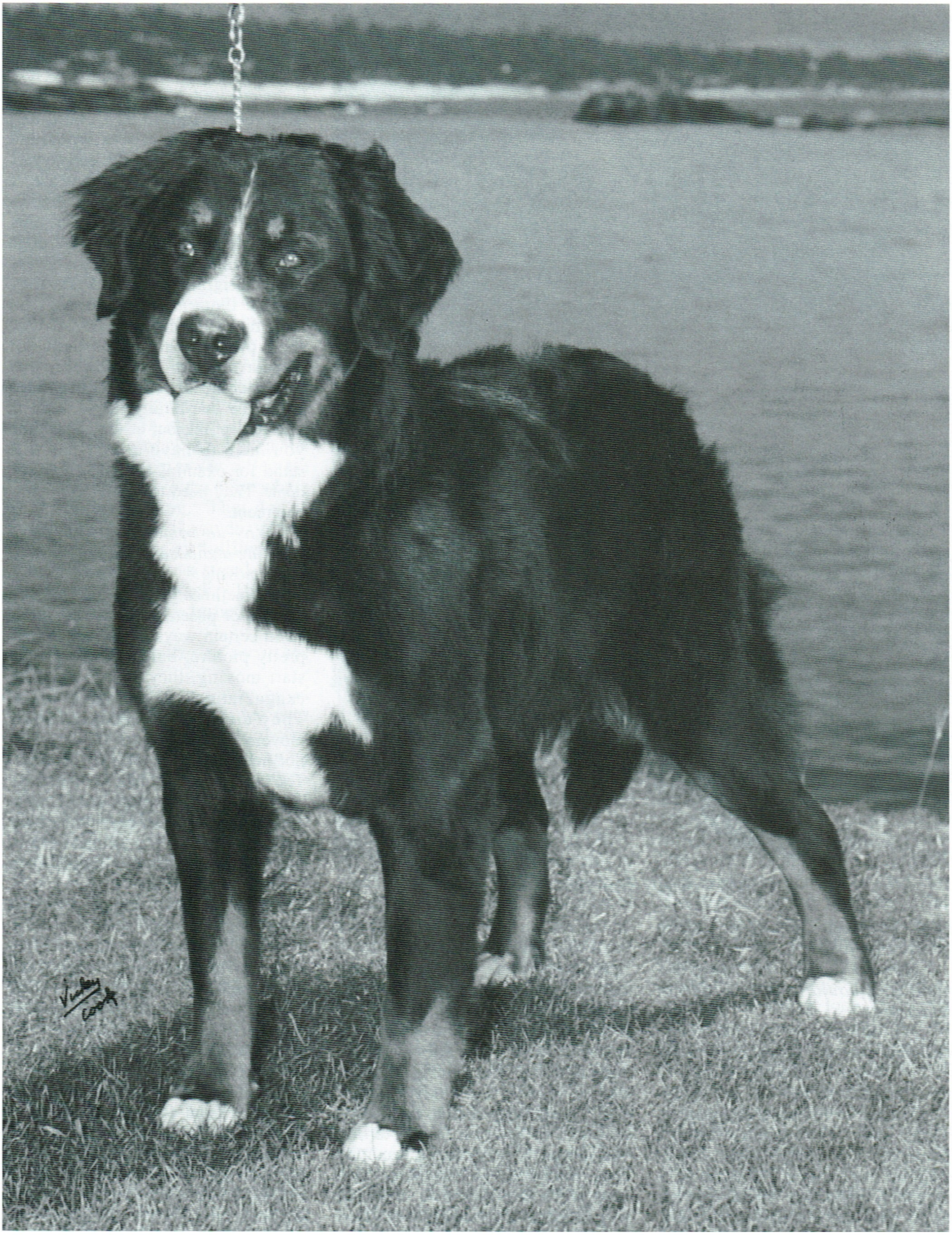
No. In fact, one of the reasons you started the Bernese Mountain Dog Annual is because while I was being interviewed for the English Cocker Quarterly, I said, "You know, you really need to have some kind of publication for the Bernese Mountain Dog. We have so little." I would like to see this grow in popularity and become a Quarterly. Our *Alpenhorn*, which is the magazine of the parent club, is excellent. The more information that is available the better. Certainly a commercial magazine is able to do a lot more than our parent club magazine in some ways, in terms of reproduction. There is always room for more.

Do you name litters by any sort of scheme?

No. Not at all. My feeling has always been that I would put my kennel name on my dogs but the owners who bought a puppy should really have the right to name it. I've never done that.

When you were breeding, do you feel that you established a distinguishable line?

No, because I really never produced enough puppies, to be honest about it. My dogs were sound. They were exceptionally sound in some ways and I really emphasized that. At the time I began, many Bernese Mountain Dogs were not. It was not unusual for dogs in the ring to be excused. They were limping more, and their temperaments were not the



Ch. Happiness' Bolt of Lightning.

the structure to pull the cart, that is what is really important.

What is your long-range goal in breeding dogs?

I was trying to come as close to the breed standard as I could and produce a dog that was typey and could move well. In the early years of the breed, that was not the case. I also wanted to breed a sound temperament. In the early years of this breed, the temperament of the dogs was often quite shy. The Swiss would originally tell you that they wanted them as shepherd dogs on their farms, somewhat protective of their property so they would not wander off with some stranger that might come around. Those dogs would be one-family dogs. That is fine to a point, but at the same time you have to have a dog that will stand for examination and be confident. They need to be sound in temperament.

Why do some dogs look good standing and posing, but not so good when moving?

Sometimes you see dogs that are stacked or posed, that are exaggerated in certain ways. It makes a very pretty picture, but the minute they start moving, they fall apart. The exaggeration works against them. They are not balanced and their movement suffers from it. They are not necessarily structurally correct. The breed standard calls for a moderate dog, but these dogs are extreme and exaggerated so that when they move, it shows. The ultimate example of this is what has happened to German Shepherds.

How should a dog move in the front coming towards you?

You should see a dog whose front moves towards you without the elbow moving out or being too wide in the front, it should not be pinched and narrow. It should move on a fairly parallel track.

And from the side?

You need to see good extension from the front end where the front legs are really reaching out in front of the dog and covering ground. In the rear they will really be pushing off and you can see that they are not overreaching so that the front end does not have to get out of the way. It should look like a very balanced

Ch. HCK Friendly Bear V. Deerpark.

best. I've seen that change quite a bit over the years.

How do you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

My opinion on this has really changed over the years, particularly as I've started judging. I used to think soundness was the key issue. You needed to have a sound dog, no matter what. I still believe that to a point, but I no longer think it is of singular importance. Breed type is extremely important. Breed type has to do with the function of the dog. The original Bernese Mountain Dog was built to be in the high country of Switzerland. I've visited there and seen the terrain. They need to be very strong dogs, able to pull carts that are laden with very heavy, full milk cans. If you've ever tried to lift a full milk can, which I have on my uncle's farm, you know it is a weighty thing. Even though it is in a cart on wheels, it is a heavy item to pull. These dogs need to be massive and able to function in that terrain. Breed type, in many ways, is number one. Soundness to a point, as these dogs work at a slow trot. They are not Golden Retrievers out there charging through the fields. If they are sound enough to pull and have picture, with reach in the front and drive in the rear. It is very important in terms of how the Bernese Mountain Dog functions. Also, in terms of how the dog should look, when it first starts moving, they usually drop their head. If you see them start to pull a cart, one of the natural things to do to gain balance and pull is to drop the head. A lot of our attitude about how a show dog should look with their head up and moving forward is not necessarily correct for a working dog.

Should you see wide rear movement or more single track?

It shouldn't be necessarily wide. It should be parallel underneath their bodies. If you see a really wide rear there is something wrong there. As they increase in speed, it moves towards single-tracking, but in the ring you should never see a Bernese Mountain Dog get to the point where it is single-tracking. That dog is moving far too fast if you do. If you see dogs working at pulling, they would never get to a speed where they would single track. The milk carts would be long turned over if they did.

What are you looking for in the head?

You are looking for a nice, broad skull and properly shaped eyes with a dark color. You also look for markings. Some judges get hung up on markings and nothing else counts. You want to see a nice, triangular shaped head with a good strong jaw. It should look like a Bernese Mountain Dog, and have a soft expression. It is not a Newfoundland or a Saint Bernard. It has a very characteristic look to it. It's very well described in the breed standard. Anyone who is showing or buying puppies, as well as breeding, needs to be very familiar with the standard.

What about the jaw line?

It's a broad-skulled dog, with a furrow and a moderate stop. Moderate is a good word for the Bernese Mountain Dog. They have a strong muzzle with a good under-jaw. They should not be snipey or hound-like. Their dentition needs to be complete. I am seeing more and more missing teeth. You can see one missing molar and say it's not a big deal, but now we are seeing dogs with two missing molars because dogs with missing molars are being bred. The problem is propagating and you get bites that are off. That is a serious fault in this breed. You get dogs that don't masticate properly so that they have dental problems later on.

Ch. Deerpark Razzamatazz. Co-owned with Millicent Kimbro.

How important is eye color?

It is very important. The expression of the Bernese Mountain Dog is very characteristic and the darker the eye, the better. When you get light or yellow eyes that are glaring at you, it is called the look of eagles. It is very piercing. It is not correct at all.

If you could rate the whole dog on a point scale of 100, how many points should the head be assigned?

The AKC took the point scale out of the breed standards awhile back. If I had to do it, I would say about 35 percent. More than a quarter, but certainly less than half of the dog. This is a functional, working dog and while it needs to look like a Bernese Mountain Dog, and their expression is part of the attraction to the breed, it is not a head breed.

How important is pigment?

It is also very important. Any other color but black in their coat color is a disqualification. It's fairly unknown, but there are cinnamon Bernese dogs out there. They pop up every now and then. It is recessive as a trait. I've seen pictures of them, but I've never seen one in person. They are really darn cute and attractive but it is not our breed. Most Bernese Mountain Dogs have nice jet black coats. Their markings are important; they are a hallmark of the breed. They are a tri-color breed. They are meant to have a jet black coat with rust and white markings. The deeper the rust, the better. They should have white accents on the paws and the tip of the tail, on the chest you will see white and it is called the Swiss Cross. You will see some on the muzzle too. We emphasize that quite a bit because it is not an easy thing to keep if you begin to breed dogs that are improperly marked. Eventually you will lose that. It is so characteristic of the breed that there is quite a bit written about it in the breed standard. On the other hand, if you emphasize only markings to the detriment of the rest of the dog, you really are losing the picture too. Again, this is a working dog. It used to be that the

Swiss would cull puppies that were not properly marked at birth. That practice is no longer in effect. When it comes right down to it and you have dogs that are equal in quality, then that should be the deciding factor, but if you keep the purpose of the breed in mind, then that should be first and foremost.

Do you ever have winter nose?

Winter nose is common in this breed. The noses will lighten up a little bit in the winter and look faded, then become darker as the year goes by. It's not a big deal. You can recognize winter nose. It's not like it is pink flesh.

What should be the relationship of chest depth to the rest of the dog? Should the chest come below the elbow?

The chest depth should definitely reach to the elbow. This is a breed that works up in the mountains. The air is thinner up there than it is at sea level. They need to have a big, capacious chest in order to work properly. When hiking around in the mountains, breathing is a very important function! There is a reason that they have the lung capacity that they do. There is nothing worse than a little pinched-in dog that you know would never make it in the mountains.

Have you seen any dogs that actually have a chest that comes to the elbow?

Yes, I do as they get older. People have a tendency to show dogs when they are too young. This is a breed that matures later on in life. There is a saying that goes something like five years a young dog, five years a middle-aged dog or an adult dog, and five years an old dog. Five years is about the prime for the Bernese Mountain Dog. Three to five are certainly the best years that they have. People show dogs when they are too young so you see chests that are not finished growing yet. Most of the adult dogs, at that age, do have that full chest.

Has it been your experience that coat is very important to winning in the ring?

Yes, it is. I can tell you why again and it is because of having been in the Alps where there is snow as well as ice and sleet. I have seen a Bernese dog that is doing quite a bit of winning with an improper coat. I know that if that dog was at work in the mountains, the snow and sleet would adhere to him and he would have a very hard time functioning because he would be weighted down and very cold. The texture of their coat is there for a reason and that is to keep them warm and safe as well as comfortable and working in that climate. People who see a Bernese Mountain Dog often ask how you keep the white so white on the dogs. I think of my dogs running around in the mud having a grand old time on the ranch. They come in, dry up and shake, and with the proper coat, it falls right off of them. They then look very clean. The improper coat will hold the moisture and the dirt so the dogs have problems. A good coat is like Teflon. It's amazing how the dirt comes off. Unfortunately, these days we are seeing a lot of overgroomed dogs who are fluffed, moussed and backbrushed.

Ch. Happiness' Diamond Solitaire.

What is an ideal front?

An ideal front is one where you have the upper arm and the shoulder of about equal length. The ideal is to meet at a 45-degree angle, but rarely is that ever achieved. That is the ideal. We work towards that because it is a functional angle and the dog will have the maximum reach when it moves on the front. Unfortunately, we see a lot of dogs with short upper arms in this breed. That has restricted their front movement. We also see a lot of wide front movement in dogs that can't quite get out of their own way in the front end, so they are unbalanced.

Can you describe the correct topline?

The Bernese topline should be level. The most important thing is to run your hand over that topline because often, grooming can fool you. A good groomer can thin and level the coat so it looks proper but really isn't. Sometimes you can't even see it when they move. You really have to get your hands into the coat and feel the topline as well as watch it. Often dogs look like they have a good topline, but once they start moving you will see that they actually don't. It is a functional thing. If the dog is in fact correctly structured, it should have a topline that is good, hard and straight.

What is the ideal height of a dog and bitch?

The ideal height should be within the breed standard. The standard calls for 25 to 27 1/2 inches for dogs and 23 to 26 inches for bitches.

Anywhere within that range is correct, but if you look at the breed standard, it emphasizes large many times. The upper end of the spectrum is probably more correct. The most important thing is that the dog be balanced in the front and rear. If you have a dog that is small-boned but leggy, the height of the dog is not as important as the fact that it is not sturdy and substantial. It really needs to be a balanced dog. Height is not the end-all/ be-all, but we are looking for a good-sized, sturdy dog that can really work at the job it is meant to do. It is a functional thing.

What is the ideal tail length and set?

The tail should reach below the hock. It should be long and straight with no kink in the tail. When you examine the dog, you just pull the tail down to the hock and make sure it extends further than that. Again, it is in the breed standard so I pay attention to it, but the common problem we see with tails is high tailsets which are very improper.

What is the ideal ear and earset?

The ear should be level with the top of the head. They should give you a very intelligent expression when they are used and brought up. They should be triangular in shape. When they are at rest, they are close to the head. When you see a Bernese coming at you, usually they have them laid back. They should not be too long or low, or they look houndy.

What is the ideal foot and should a dog with bad feet be used?

Feet are very important. Again, this is a working dog and they are meant to be working in mountainous terrain, so it is important to have a nice, tight foot. If a dog has bad feet, this should definitely be a consideration when contemplating whether to breed the dog or not.

Does making the Top Ten or Twenty mean anything?

It does. You would not get to that point unless you had a dog that was a good dog or a bitch. On the other hand, there are dogs that reach that status that are heavily publicized, that are put out with professional handlers and are overgroomed and campaigned in a way that is rather political. I'm not certain those are the best examples of the breed in all cases. There are a lot of beautiful dogs that I have seen out on ranches. A friend of mine has one that is a Swiss import. It is just a gorgeous dog, but she has no interest in showing. He is sitting up there on a hill and he is a lovely specimen of the breed. He is far better than a lot in the Top Twenty, but you will not see him there. People who pick dogs or bitches to breed to need to recognize it is not the most important criteria.

Ch. Happiness' Bolt of Lightning.

Is judging fair?

A lot of the time it is. In a breed that is relatively unknown, such as the Bernese Mountain Dog, we have somewhat suffered. I use that word with reason. On the whole, I think judging is fair. I see lots of individual cases where it is not fair for reasons that are perhaps political or handlers being on dogs that know how to show dogs better than an amateur might. They have the edge. Judges who have not bothered to go to a judges' seminar and educated themselves don't know the breed well. They are there because they have been judges for a long time and know the general principles of movement, but they do not know the nuances of the breed. That is not always the case. It is always a joy to see a judge, and particularly a new judge, who is taking the time to learn the breed. They ask questions of the breeders and they do a good and proper job.

Does advertising influence judges?

It does. Not in the classes so much. The classes are more fair than the Breed judging, but when you get to the Breed and National Specialty level, it does influence people. If you see a dog in numerous magazines with its wins and handler, you recognize the dog. If judges are unsure in making a decision, that can't help but affect a judge. It would affect them just as much as advertising on television certainly affects us. There are a number of good judges who know the breed well and no matter what amount of advertising is done, they will put up the best dog. That is always a pleasure to see.

Is it ethical to retouch an advertising photograph?

In some instances it is. If somebody is wearing the wrong color behind the dog and you can't see the dog, that would be okay. Perhaps there is a leash in the picture that needs to be airbrushed out so you can see the dog better. If you are structurally changing the dog, then no, it is very unethical. The dog should remain as the dog is.

Do you always show your own dogs?

No. I was always too nervous to be a handler. I was always the groomer and gofer. My girls and my sister are very good handlers. The girls came up through Junior Showmanship, and have finished Bernese for other people. I was very happy to let them show our dogs. We really did this as a family activity. It's taught them a lot about competition in life and how to be responsible. They have also learned to be in the breed for the right reasons, hopefully.

How do you train puppies and at what age?

We usually took them to puppy socialization class because it was important for them to be around other dogs and people. We took them to parks. Because we had four children, there were always kids at our house. There is nothing cuter than a Bernese puppy, so the kids were always hugging, squeezing, petting and brushing them. We used to joke that they were going to get their hair rubbed off of them and their feet would never touch the ground. They did their rounds in baby carriages and wagons. The kids pretty much did the socialization for us. We tried to get them out as much as possible. I remember telling the kids to let the puppies alone so they could sleep.

Do you believe in obedience training?

I do, very much so. There are so many people who think they have a conformation show dog and so they shouldn't take it to obedience class, because it might sit instead of stand or you might break its spirit, so it wouldn't show as well. I really disagree with that. Bernese Mountain Dogs are an intelligent breed and they know the difference between collars and commands. They can discriminate between these things. I highly recommend that any large dog, or any dog period, even small dogs, go to class so that they are good citizens. Their show career is a very small part of their lives. How they live with people is the largest part of their lives, so that is a very critical thing in my mind. The Bernese is easy to train, so there is no reason to not take them. If they are left home and not able to be very social, they can become shy.

Ch. Happiness' Diamond Solitaire. Now owned by Patti Bailey.

How intelligent is the breed compared with others?

They are in the upper three-quarters in the scheme of things. They are pretty intelligent. There are a lot of stories of the Bernese being an intuitive dog. By this I mean they are just sort of very sweet, lying around pillow dogs until the time comes when someone tries to break into the house, and they become ferocious watch dogs. If something threatens a child, they will step in to protect the child. There was a story in a column where a baby that had a leg deformity could not walk properly. It learned to walk by pulling itself up on the family's Bernese Mountain Dog. The dog would stand there and the child would pull itself up by the coat of the dog and with its leg braces, it would walk along next to the dog. The dog would walk ever so slowly so the child could do it. That is a great story. There are a lot of them like that and they give you chills. The breed is very sensitive and intelligent.

Is it appropriate to take a dog anywhere off-leash?

No. When I was very young, I worked at a veterinary hospital. The largest cause of death for dogs was being hit by a car. They were always dead on arrival. My initial response to this is, not anywhere there might be a vehicle around. Bernese are usually very good about sticking close to their owners. They are not a breed that will take off on you. Out in the woods or in the country, yes, it is fine. I've done that with my dogs. If you do it anywhere, do it there. Don't do it where there are vehicles around.

Can shy or aggressive dogs be corrected with training?

Sometimes. The shy ones are harder. You can bring them along to a certain point, but if it's genetic shyness, and I say that because it does

Ch. HCK Friendly Bear V. Deerpark.

run in certain lines, it is harder to do. I've had owners come to me in tears because their dogs are very shy. They have done everything they possibly could, but they feel guilty and think they have done something wrong. It may be just innate in the dog's temperament. That kind of dog will probably never be greatly improved. To some extent, you can desensitize them, but you can never totally correct the problem. It's likewise with aggressive dogs. You didn't used to see that very much in the Bernese, but we have seen it more lately. There have been some popular dogs that have been used at stud who have been on the aggressive side, so their offspring have been as well. It is incorrect in the breed. You can control that to a certain degree, but it takes a certain personality to be able to manage that. When you get that type of dog with the wrong person who is not dominant, that is a recipe for disaster.

Does a big-name handler help a dog to win?

Sometimes. Fifteen years ago, I would have naively said no. It particularly counts in the Breed ring (Best of Breed) and in the Group ring. Amateur handlers need to become very proficient to compete.

Can you give any specific advice to owners who would like to handle their own dog?

Yes. Go to conformation classes. Don't just go to one instructor. Try to alternate between two or three classes if you can. Spend as much time at dog shows watching and learning. Watch the people who are successful. Don't just be breed specific, watch other breeds too. Watch the Group ring and try to attend handling seminars. Be willing to learn and talk with others as well as take advice from them. Above all, be patient; it is a skill that takes time and practice.

Are your breedings natural or controlled? Do you ever do any artificial insemination?

They are all natural. Some Bernese Mountain stud dogs have sort of an odd libido. A number of them are okay and will breed a bitch no matter what, but a lot of them are very sensitive. They don't like people handling them and if you interfere with them at all they will forget it. There have been great strides made in fresh and cooled semen that will probably help dogs like that to be bred. I'm not sure that is the type of temperament we should promote. In fact, if the dog isn't willing to breed naturally, there is probably some reason for it and we shouldn't be pursuing it.

Did you ever help a mating along?

Not really, other than encouraging the dog. One time there was a mating with a virgin stud dog and a virgin bitch. I had to do some encouraging and help them along, but in general, if the bitch is ready to be bred and all the signs are normal, it is probably going to happen. If we force AI, we are just looking for problems.

Ch. HCK Friendly Bear V. Deerpark.

What is a fair stud fee?

It should be on the order of a pet puppy. Often you have the option of taking a stud puppy or a stud fee, and I think those two should be about equal. Obviously, the owner of a stud has put a lot of money into finishing his dog before breeding it. There are a lot of health checks. It's worth that. Plus, there is the time and effort put into the dog.

Should a stud fee be the same for an unproven and proven dog, regardless of its title?

Not necessarily. If you are dealing with a first-time stud dog, then it is to the benefit of the owner to have the dog have puppies on the ground. At that point, the stud fee should be somewhat reduced.

Why would you refuse to service a bitch?

If I looked at a pedigree and saw in the background dogs that had genetic problems which I knew of, I would say no. If the bitch came to me and was not of proper type or not sound enough, I would refuse. I would also look at their temperament as well. I would not breed a bitch unless I felt confident that her owner was ethical and would do the right things in raising and placing the puppies.

Would you breed to a dog with a serious fault if he was outstanding in other areas?

That is a tough question. You almost have to take that on an individual basis. When I think of serious faults according to the breed standard, I have to look at all angles. Let's say a dog had an incorrect bite: You really wouldn't be doing yourself any favors by breeding to this dog because you will see it in the offspring. You don't want to pass that along. I'm not sure anymore if it would be necessary. We now have a large enough gene pool that we have a choice in what to breed to. Fifteen years ago, your choices were a lot more limited than they are now. My suggestion to someone would be to stay clear and find a dog that is more moderate all around but has good genetic material behind it. Often, I find it is very important to look at the ancestors of the dog rather than just the dog itself. Also look at the littermates of the dog you are considering.

Are you seeing a trend in popularization?

I do. They are very attractive dogs and easy to live with. I get calls all of the time for puppies even though people know I am not breeding any longer. My name is out there because I'm president of the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Northern California, I am on the board of directors of the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America, and I am a judge. I always tell people what the issues are when they call, such as joint problems, longevity problems and the high incidence of various cancers. The breed has rapidly become popular. You see them in dog food advertisements now. I see them in catalogs for trendy clothing. I saw one on a cover. You can walk down the street and see them. When I first had one, people would ask me if the dog was a cross between a Collie and a Saint Bernard. Now people know what the breed is. To some degree, it has hurt the breed because there are people out there who don't understand concepts in breeding dogs and they are buying them with the idea that these are expensive dogs. They want to make money breeding them.

They are not necessarily responsible about how the dogs are placed. We are seeing dogs cropping up in the newspaper that need rescuing. We've had several older dogs that have needed help and we never would have had this in the past.

Is it a good idea to breed to the top-winning dog regardless of pedigrees?

No, that isn't a good idea. You need to look at the breed standard and at what the dog you are thinking of breeding to has to offer your bitch. Find a good match in terms of pedigree and breed type. Just because a dog is a top-winning dog does not mean it is the right one for you.

How many litters should a bitch have?

A bitch is not fully mature until she is three years old. They become veterans when they are seven, so perhaps three or four. After that, they start to decline physically and it is too hard on them.

Do you supplement feed very young puppies?

Not unless there is a problem. If a puppy is weak or the mother is not producing enough milk, then I would. It may need a little help for the first few days to get it through a critical period. If this is the case, then it is fine. I have done that. In terms of just doing it to do it, no. If it is a very large litter, you might consider it, but Bernese usually don't have very large litters.

Do you wean the puppies yourself or let the bitch do it?

I would do it gradually. I would start feeding the puppies so the more I fed them, the less I fed mom. Usually, by the time puppies are really truly ready to be 100 percent weaned, the mom has sort of lost patience with them. Those sharp little needle teeth hurt, so you help them along.

At what age do you evaluate your puppies for pet or show quality and what do you look for?

About eight weeks. Once they get to be nine weeks and beyond, they start going through funny stages. One week they will look one way, and the next week they look like something else. Then they look like awkward teenagers. For anyone who really wants to see the development of the breed, Sharon Smith has written a book called *The New Bernese Mountain Dog*, in which there is a wonderful sequence of pictures of a Best in Show Bernese Mountain Dog from the time he was a young puppy until he was mature. You would not recognize that dog as being the same dog throughout those stages. You see him go through his adolescence and young adulthood. If you are lucky, when you look at a dog at eight weeks, that is what they will come back to. If you get two out of a litter that are really nice quality and you feel confident to call them show potential, then you are fortunate. I've been very conservative in terms of what I call show puppies. Because of this, all of the dogs I have pegged as good quality dogs have finished. There are many who could have finished who are people's beautiful pets, as I never required that they be shown if they turned out.

You look for a dog that is well balanced. The dog should have sturdy bone. All parts should be put together well. You look at markings and you can see those at a very young age. Overall, if the dog looks as it should to you and feels right to you, it's okay. You need to feel the topline, angle of the shoulders and the angle of the rear and set on of the tail. I close my eyes and run my hands over the puppy and ask myself if it is feeling what I think it should feel like. I do this for adults too. If it is the case, it usually comes together. You should pick the dog up one end at a time and drop its feet to see if they drop in the right place in the front and rear. See if the elbow is right under the shoulder. If the parts seem to fit, more often than not, you're okay.

Do you feel that their adult temperament starts to show at a young age?

Sometimes, yes. You will see a very dominant puppy and I know that puppy needs to be placed correctly because it will give its owner a run for his money. With the right owner who will establish the fact that they are the pack leader, that dog will be fine. If you place them incorrectly, it may get out of hand. On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes you see a puppy that is on the quiet side or a little shy that once it is taken away from its littermates, will blossom. It becomes entirely differently. I believe in temperament testing to some degree, but it is not the last word. Shy puppies that will stay shy can often be spotted at a young age.

What should a show puppy sell for?

The prices in Bernese have been quite high. Usually, in this area, it is in the range of $1,000 to $1,500, which is more common for a show quality puppy. It's not an easy breed to raise. They have a lot of joint problems and a lot of puppies need to be replaced for that reason. They have small litters for their size. A lot of them have to be C-sectioned. Short life spans are common and a lot of them never reach breeding potential because of health problems. It's not an easy breed to raise, but some people who breed raise large volumes of them and for them it is a commercial venture. They keep the prices inflated for everyone.

Did you sell your puppies with a spay/neuter agreement?

Always, if they are not sold as show quality. Again, in Bernese Mountain Dogs, I have not sold that many.

At what age should puppies be placed in their new home?

I break the litter by eight weeks. I know people who will run puppies on longer, especially show potential puppies, because they are trying to pick what they want. That is a mistake, because puppies need to go to their new homes sooner. Clarence Pfafenberger, in his book on the development of puppies for Guide Dogs for The Blind, has emphasized that seven weeks is the optimum time to place a puppy. Breeders these days think that is a little on the young side.

How important is diet in raising this breed?

It is very important. When I first got into large dogs many years ago, you gave them high protein food. They were supplement dogs. I had a few Retrievers before the Bernese. You gave them vitamins and calcium supplements. You gave them everything you could to help them in their growth. Statistically now, studies have shown that this is the exact opposite of what you should do. You should keep their protein level down and not force their growth. You should not supplement feed. Veterinary research has proven this to be true.

Do you condition your dogs?

To a certain extent. We lived on a small ranch with nine acres. There was a lot of running back and forth. We had a boarding kennel with people in all of the time. With the kids there was always a lot of activity going on. In terms of road work or such, I simply didn't have time to do it There was enough going on without it. I don't have any Bernese right now because I don't have that type of set-up. If Bernese are left to their own devices, they can be lazy. They will get paunchy. They need to be worked some or just exercised by walking, which is very good for them.

When showing the breed, how much grooming should be done?

This is a very controversial question. More and more we are seeing dogs in the show ring that are fluffed, moussed and sculpted. It's very improper. Right in the breed standard it says dogs are to be shown in a natural condition. Unfortunately, the way dog shows are and if you want to do Group winning or placing, judges think a dog that has a magnificent outline is the way to go. That isn't proper. When I give judges' seminars, that is one of the things I really emphasize. This is a natural, working dog. Overgrooming is not proper for the breed.

What are some of your favorite grooming products?

I tend to use Mr. Groom products. I never fussed much. Once you bathe and dry the Bernese, they are usually ready to go. You can even naturally dry them. It doesn't take a whole lot.

Do you trim their whiskers?

I did when I was showing, simply because I thought it looked neater. A lot of owners tend to keep their dogs natural without trimming the whiskers and that is just as proper.

How do you kennel your dogs?

When I had them, we always had a dog door. The dogs would come up on the porch from their fenced yard and they could come into the house. While they didn't have the run of the whole house, they could certainly have access to the house at all times. Even though I had a boarding kennel, my dogs were not kennel dogs, they were house dogs. They were used to being with people. I don't think Bernese are meant to be kennel dogs. They are much too sensitive and people-oriented for that. Some of the larger show breeders do have too many dogs for them to be indoors. You could not have 30 dogs in your house, so they are kept in a kennel outside. It takes a good judge to look at show attitude and know that dogs that are kept inside may be less showy than dogs kept outside who are desperate for attention.

Can adult males and females be kept together in the same run or exercise area?

Yes, absolutely. My dogs were never kept in runs. We had one dog and three bitches who all got along just fine. I had two other breeds and they all got along well. Bernese were originally farm animals. They get along well with other creatures. It always amazes me that when you go to the National Specialty – last year it was in Colorado – in a big gym-like structure where sound would echo, and you don't hear them bark. They are quiet and get along well. Whenever I see an aggressive temperament, I know it's wrong. It should not be, and people should take note of this and not use that dog for breeding. It does not represent the Bernese.

How important is animal husbandry?

It is very important. Bernese Mountain Dogs are not rabbits or animals that can be kept in confined quarters, no matter how clean the facilities are. They need to be with people. They do need to be bathed every so often and kept tidy. Brushing is necessary, too.

Do you feel they should go to a kennel with big winners to purchase a pup?

Purchasers should go to people who have a track record. Go to people who have been around for awhile. Hopefully, those people will help and guide them. They will get them going in the right direction in the breed. Just because someone is a big winner in the breed doesn't mean he is ethical or will help you and be there for you when you need him. You need to interview several people and if you have to wait a year for a puppy, it is worth it. I would be wary if someone has puppies available, because my experience is that a well-bred litter from a good breeder is sold before they are conceived, so you should figure on being on a waiting list. Be very careful about the contracts and strings attached to the puppy. If you have any questions, talk to others and find out what is going on. Go to these people, ask them questions and follow your instincts and the advice of others. There is nothing wrong with this.

Would you recommend going to a local breed club, a national breed club and/or an all breed club for people starting out?

I would begin with a local club, and if none were available, contact the national club. You should spend time with people who have been in the breed and can give you good advice. Clubs provide activities that are good for you and your dog in terms of socialization and the purpose of the breed. They can teach your dog how to cart, which they are meant to do. Even though the activities center around the dogs, some of my best friends who are lifelong friends, have been made in the dog world. The friends I have made and the companionship of my dogs are what have made this whole activity worthwhile.

Do you feel that the parent club is doing enough to educate judges and new members?

Yes, I do. It has held breed seminars for many years. I've been the organizer of several of those. We give regional seminars and judges' workshops. We have made ourselves available at every opportunity when asked. A new person in the breed can get a lot of information, names of local people, and names of clubs. It is a very hard-working group of people who have the best interest of the breed at heart. I support them all the way. I am in my third term on the board. I feel it is a good breed

Ch. Happiness' Diamond In The Ruff.

with wonderful people and this is my way of giving back.

Is there an AKC video in this breed?

Yes, there is. In fact, I was one of the advisors when the video was made in New Jersey. We had a very rainy day when it was made, which in some ways is good because you see the dogs and not the grooming. There were dogs not there I would have liked to see on the video, but they couldn't be there for whatever reasons. It is an excellent tool for someone who is getting started and wants an idea of the breed standard.

How long have you lived in your present location?

I have lived here for five years.

Where else have you previously lived?

I was in Sunol, about 30 miles south of here, for ten years prior. I grew up on the East Coast.

Can we ask how old you are?

Sure, I am going to turn 50 next year.

Are you married?

Yes, I am very happily married. My wonderful husband is a large animal veterinarian. We met when I was helping a cow deliver. He has been a horse doctor and now does research at UC Davis on viruses. He shares my love of dogs, but not my love of dog shows. We have finished his little Terriers. He would rather be home or out kayaking. Sometimes he sees the double standards at the shows and doesn't care for it.

What have you done for a living?

I have done many things. I was a research scientist for fifteen years. I had a large boarding kennel that had up to 150 animals for ten years. At the same time, I was a management consultant for a number of years. Simultaneously I started teaching at the college level, which I found to be very rewarding. I now teach graduate courses, and I am an academic advisor at the University of San Francisco.

What do you teach?

Classes in organization development, which are management classes. I'm just finishing my doctorate in organizational leadership. I'm working my way through my dissertation. That will be my 50th birthday present to myself.

Do you see yourself slowing down after that?

No. I'll probably never slow down. In dogs, my judging career is the direction I will take. We have our dogs as pets and will show them to finish them. We may do a little dabbling in breeding of breeds I am not judging.

Can you tell me a little about the dogs you have now?

It is a very odd assortment. People find it interesting that I am still involved in the Bernese Mountain Dog, because we currently don't have any with us. I still co-own a couple of Bernese Mountain Dogs with good friends of mine. Someday we will own another one when we have more room. We now have six dogs. I have three and my husband has three, so it is very equal. My husband has a fifteen-and-a-half-year-old Group winning Silky Terrier, a champion Norwich Terrier, and then his latest is our Miniature Bull Terrier. I have two English Cockers who are my fourth and fifth generation champions that produced very well. Between my sister and I, she has had three English Cockers and I have had four in residence over the years. We bred very occasionally, but we've bred over 25 champions and many with performance titles. Of those seven English Cockers, we will have five English Cockers of Merit, which we are very proud of. Then I have recently acquired a young Whippet bitch, who is a wonderful dog.

Do you feel there is anything we haven't covered or any soapboxes?

No. When you have had a hard day at work and you are upset or you are sick or for some reason you are not quite yourself, the dogs always seem to know. They will always be especially attentive to you. When you have hard times in your life, they will grab on to you and they will be there to make you feel good. When I think of anything in terms of the Bernese, it is hard to come up with a large breed dog that is more sensitive. They are human-like this way. They have a short life span, but if you can get beyond that, it is hard to find another dog that would be any better.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

Certainly for the ten years I had the boarding kennel on the ranch, they were all-encompassing. My children and I learned a lot of lessons when competing. The dogs have been a large part of my life and my children's lives and they continue to bring us great joy.

Have there been any drawbacks?

One thing I consider a drawback is breeders who can't possibly give dogs the attention they need because they own and breed too many. It is a commercial thing for them. The dogs we have keep us busy full time. They are like my children in terms of time commitment. When I see dogs being objects rather than companions with feelings, then that turns me off to the dog show world. I don't like people who get into the breed to make money; they produce too many dogs. They are not honest with people and do not take care of their dogs as individuals. They don't have enough time to help their puppy buyers. Unethical people in the breed really bother me. Fortunately, they are few and far between. Overall, this breed comes with wonderful people.

Have your children continued in dogs?

They have in some instances. They are all in their twenties right now and a couple of them have lifestyles that make it difficult to have dogs. I have one daughter who has traveled the world. She spent a year in China and a year in Central America. It has not been possible for her. I know when she settles down, she will have dogs. Occasionally, she is still happy to show a dog or two. My other daughter is a trainer for Guide Dogs for The Blind in San Rafael. She is very involved with dogs at a different level. She is not interested in showing dogs at this time but, obviously, her whole life revolves around them. I am very proud of her.

It's been very enjoyable and I can certainly see how much you enjoy and love your dogs. Thank you for the information you've shared.

Thank you, it's been very nice. •

FIRST PLACE
VETERAN BITCH
A Bridge to Friendship

*Ch. Happiness' Bolt of Lightning at eleven years of age!
Now owned by Rhonda Edwards and Craig Andrade.*

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Suzanne Hostetter

The Bernese Mountain
Dog Annual
Talks with
Suzanne Hostetter
ALPENROSE FARM
Rochester, Washington

This interview was conducted at the home of Suzanne Hostetter in May of 1998 by Nancy J. Cozby.

How long have you been in this breed?

I've had Bernese Mountain Dogs since 1976. I saw my first Berner at a fun match in 1974.

How did you first get a start in dogs, other than as pets?

I took an obedience class with my Sheltie, and became interested in obedience competition with her. She was a wonderful dog and very good in obedience. It was while I was training and showing her that I first saw a Berner. It wasn't until I got Bernese that I started showing in conformation.

Why this breed, and how did you find your first dog?

In 1974, Bernese were quite rare. One day at a fun match in Los Angeles, this big beautiful tricolored dog went by. I had never seen a dog like it and I thought, "What a beautiful mixed breed!" Later that day, someone went by with two of them, and I knew it had to be a breed! There were several at the match that day, and their temperaments were wonderful: easy-going, very loving, willing to please and devoted to their owners. From that point on, my husband and I looked for BMDs at every show we went to. As compared to today's numbers, the records for 1974 show there were 157 individual Berners exhibited in the entire U.S. that year, and a cumulative total of 1,113 dogs registered since AKC accepted the breed in 1937. In southern California, there were very few to be found. I remember going to the Santa Barbara show, very excited that there was one entered. We waited until after Group judging and went over to meet him, and were so disappointed when he growled and wanted nothing to do with us (the handler said he was "reserved"). This was very much out of character with the other ones we had met, and it was our first exposure to the problems with the variation of temperament within the breed.

As we continued our search, we looked in dog magazines and tried to locate breeders that way. We asked at pet stores, and, even in 1975, were told they could get us a puppy – how sad! We contacted the national club, and called all over the United States, talking to breeders and asking questions. We were on a waiting list for our pup before the litter was even conceived. So, in these respects, things haven't changed that much. When the litter was finally on the ground, there were ten beautiful bouncing babies and we fell in love with a show potential male.

What originally made you decide to breed?

Our original purpose in getting our first Berner, Konig, (Ch. Yodler's Konig v. Bernerhof CD), was as a companion, not for showing and breeding. We didn't know much about the conformation ring, but were willing to enter him if the breeder wanted, since he had been evaluated as one of the top males in the litter. We showed him a little as a puppy, and I continued to work in obedience. A friend who greatly admired Konig offered to show him for us. For the most part, there wasn't much competition in southern California – at most shows, there would be a male special, our class dog, and a class bitch. There were supported entries every once in awhile, and Konig finished quite easily, considering. He was a very sound dog, and clean coming and going. He was overmarked, and had what is called a "Swiss smile," where the rust on the sides of the face did not extend to the edge of his mouth. He had good hips and elbows, and an outgoing temperament.

Meanwhile, we had joined the national club, read the newsletters, and listened to everyone talking about the breed. We attended our first BMDCA National Specialty in Fresno, California, in 1977, as well as attending Berner Fest in northern California, and any other breed activities we could find. The more we listened and learned, the more it became apparent that there was a great need for temperament, soundness and type to become more consistent in the breed; that Bernese were bred to be working dogs and the highest priority in breeding should be to preserve the basic ability to do the job they were bred for. There were not a lot of dogs to work with. I believed Konig had many qualities that were needed at that time in the breed.

Konig, ten years old.

Markings are important, but they do not enhance the ability to be a farm dog, to pull a cart or work with the dairy cows. We needed to broaden what was being done in breeding programs in order to keep the all-purpose farm dog heritage, and to concentrate less on the "showy" attributes of the breed and more on the working ability.

It was at this point in time that I moved to Issaquah, in western Washington, and had the time and space to pursue my growing interest in the breed, consider a breeding program and begin a search for a foundation bitch. By that time, I had done a lot of research and had spent time concentrating on understanding the problems inherent in the breed, as well as all of the positive aspects. Even so, I had been fortunate that my first BMD was sound, and I did not fully realize the frustrations of the orthopedic problems in this breed. My first girl, Cassie, was a sweetheart with a wonderful temperament and very nice type. Unfortunately, she had a myriad of conformation problems, and was limping by five months of age. This began my indoctrination into the world of elbow problems. The term "puppy limp" was common in the breed, and the advice at the time was to leave her alone, she'd grow out of it; it was no big deal and would "go away." But watching her, it was obvious she was in pain, and I wanted to know more about what was going on.

Fragmented coronoid process was diagnosed in both elbows along with bilateral hip dysplasia. A lot of research was being done at that time, specifically in Bernese Mountain Dogs, by Dr. Wind at the University of California at Davis. Through her, I came to have a much better understanding of the front end problems in the breed. Cassie was spayed, and the search began again. My second bitch, Val, had lovely type, a beautiful pedigree, and a wonderful temperament. She had good hips and never limped as a pup. I showed her quite a bit, but my lack of handling skills kept her from finishing! She was found to have thyroid problems and elbow dysplasia. Through all of this, one's education continues and you find yourself developing very strong ideas of what you feel is of greatest importance in the breed. My third bitch, Missy (Alpenrose Mountain Mist) was a very sound bitch and had a great temperament, although I would have wished for better type. She became the dam of my first three litters, and a top producer.

Ch. Alpen Farms Fortissimo, Fritz
(Ch. Yodler's Konig v. Bernerhof CD x Alpenrose Sunbear v. Harlquin).

How many litters have you bred?

For the most part, I've named my litters alphabetically, and am almost through the alphabet.

Which would you say was your best litter?

The two that stand out in my mind are the "A" and "F" litters. Both of these litters were beautiful, sound in body and mind and very healthy throughout their lifetimes. They were great companions, and some were show dogs, as well. For the most part, they lived long lives, following in their sire's pawprints. Three of the "F" litter are still doing well at eleven years of age. Health and longevity are issues that are not given enough priority in this breed. The current "best guess" is that the average lifespan is seven to nine years, which is not as good as in other breeds of similar size and build. A good healthy Mountain Dog should live ten to twelve years, but we have a lot of cancer problems, as well as the orthopedic problems that lower the average age of death.

How many champions have been in the litters you have bred?

Probably nine or ten. Placing my dogs in show homes has not been a priority. These dogs need to be family members and companions first. They will be great in whatever interest their people participate in, be it conformation, obedience, search and rescue, therapy work, or just a loving friend. I choose homes for my puppies based upon what will be best for the puppy, and many show homes do not give the dog the kind of life I would wish for every puppy. If showing dogs is a hobby and it is FUN, then it will be enjoyed for what it is by both dog and owner. But when too much competition and "sport" are involved, I do not believe care is always taken to do what is best for the dog. I would like to see showing return to being an evaluation of breeding stock, rather than a sport of who can show the best. Bernese Mountain Dogs were not bred to excel in a show ring, they were bred as a farm dog, with a temperament and conformation to do draft and droving work – not to compete with other breeds to find the dog that most "asked for the win."

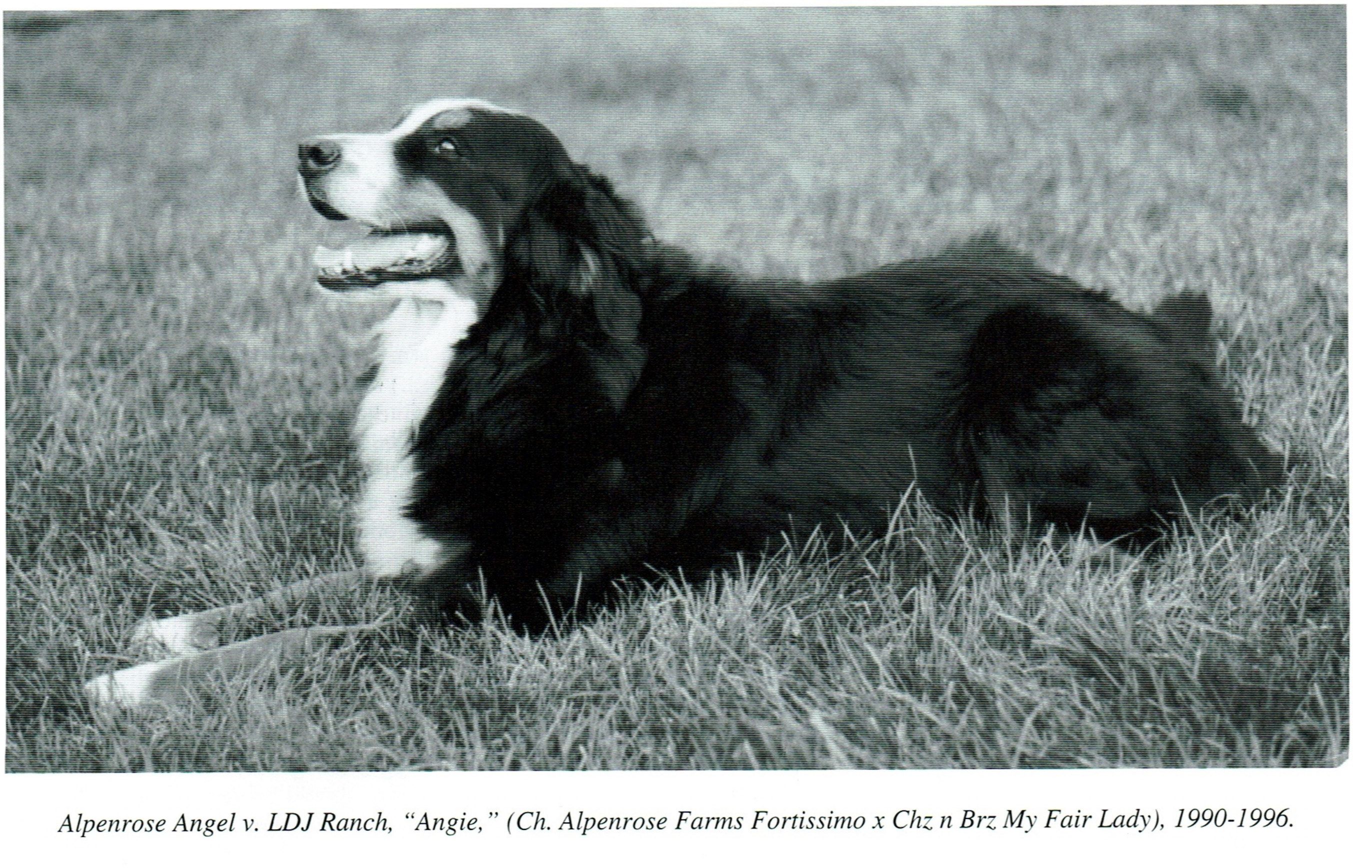
What's the best dog you have owned or bred?

That's really tough, because they are all very special to me. Best dog, to me, does not mean biggest champion, most well-known, etc. Best dog means best fit in my heart as well as to the standard. I'd have to say my best was Fred – Ch. Alpenrose Farms Free Spirit – he was a wonderful dog who seemed to understand my thoughts. When he was a young dog, he was dubbed "Freddy the Philosopher," and it was an apt description because he would sit and wag and smile, seemingly sizing up the situation before jumping in to add his two cents! He had many of his sire Konig's good qualities, especially soundness and sense of humor, with his dam Sunny's (Alpenrose Sunbear v. Harlquin) calm, sensitivity and type. We had a very unique twinkle of communication between us.

Which was the biggest winner?

I've shown my dogs to champi-

Ch. Alpenrose Farms Abby CD and Ch. Alpenrose Farms Brando.



Alpenrose Angel v. LDJ Ranch, "Angie," (Ch. Alpenrose Farms Fortissimo x Chz n Brz My Fair Lady), 1990-1996.

Ch. Alpenrose Farms Jubilation CD.

onships, but have not seriously specialed any. I had two dogs take first place in BMDCA National Specialty Bred-by-Exhibitor classes – Abby (Ch. Abby von Alpenrose CD) in 1986 and Fred in 1989, where he went on to take Reserve Winners Dog. Brando (Ch. Alpenrose Farms Brando), placed first in a very large puppy sweeps 9-12 class in 1985. Winning a class at a National Specialty is, to me, much more important and a much greater honor than taking lots of Best of Breed wins at all breed shows.

What's your favorite story about an individual dog?

One that says a lot about breed temperament and always makes me smile is about Konig, my first Bernese Mountain Dog. I had recently moved to Washington State and had ten acres on which I was learning a great deal about animal husbandry. I had chickens, goats, ducks and sheep. My husband had just gotten a new job, and he'd invited his new boss and his wife over for dinner. I had made a great feast for us all and as I was putting it on the table, I glanced out the window to see Konig out in the backyard with a chicken pinned under his front paws. My imagination went crazy – I had visions of blood and chicken parts everywhere. I politely excused myself (my mother TRIED to raise me right ...) and bolted for the back door in my fine clothes and stockings screaming unmentionable things at Konig. He looked up, wagged his tail and gave me a big Berner smile as if to say "Hi Mom, I was just hangin' out and this chicken flew over the fence and I thought she needed a bath." The chicken was alive and well. Not a scratch on her – no feathers, though, because he had licked them all off! That chicken went on to live a long time, although she never laid another egg! (laughter) Bernese Mountain Dogs should be very good around livestock, and should not have the high prey drive that is found in many breeds. Their temperament needs to be such that they could live on a farm with a variety of animals, act as a watch dog, and be a good companion. They are very often associated with dairy farms and anyone who has milked cows or goats knows that one facet of good milk production is low stress – no hyperactive herding dogs, etc. You could not throw an uninitiated Bernese Mountain Dog into a pen of livestock without supervision and expect him to ignore them, but for a city dog, new to all of this farm business, I thought Konig did well!

Was that dog your biggest character?

Oh, he was a character, yes! I've had several others I'd also put in that category, but being my first Mountain Dog, my first large dog, and my first intact male dog makes him stand out (laughter). He was smart enough to take advantage of my ignorance and did a lot of things seemingly with a smirk on his face! Putting a CD on him was a great lesson in humility and patience, after training Shelties! He would go to a show and do the exercises methodically – he was an expert lagger and, at that point in time, the training techniques all used negative reinforcement, which only made it worse. It was as if he knew what he was doing – he wouldn't lag like he hated it, more like he considered it a challenge to see what he could come up with next, knowing full well my heart was in my throat! He'd just mosey along, about a foot behind me, with this huge panting grin on his face, wagging his tail and playing to the crowd!

Brando at nine months.

Can pedigrees in this breed be trusted?

Yes. I would, however, say that with breed popularity comes breeding by individuals that are either ignorant or unscrupulous, and pedigrees that contain dogs not known by the Berner folk in the area, or kennel names that are not recognized, should be carefully researched.

How have you used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when do you think each should he used?

Outcrossing and linebreeding both need to be used judiciously. Any breeding should be done only when you have researched the relatives of the sire and dam and you have a good reason for doing the breeding. I believe in linebreeding; if you only outcross, you are not strengthening the depth of the good traits you are hoping to get. Outcrossing is easier, and you can get some very nice dogs, but they don't reproduce themselves. We need to use linebreeding to learn more about what's going on in the breed and in the different lines, in order to know what we really have. But we also need to be very careful to remove any but the best get from the gene pool. Most pups out of every litter should be spayed/neutered. Only the very best need to reproduce.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

All of the long-time Berner fanciers that I've talked to and worked with have influenced the way I view the dogs and the breeding of them. But the greatest influence has been the dogs themselves. Watching them grow and change and mature, live to old age, or die young – all of the lessons they have taught me have really shaped the way I view Bernese Mountain Dogs, breeding, dogs, and life in general.

How many dogs do you keep now?

Currently, I have twelve dogs. It varies. I am committed to being responsible for the puppies I produce from the day they are born until the day they die. At various times I have dogs here that have been returned to me because of circumstances beyond

Ch. Alpenrose Undeniably Utah.

the owner's control. I will keep them here until I find the right home for them. Many can be placed, but if not, they have a lifetime home with me. Getting dogs back doesn't happen frequently, but it does happen and anyone breeding a litter must take responsibility for this action by following the pups and taking responsibility when necessary. Also, I have been lucky to have very long-lived dogs, so I have several veterans gracing my couches! I currently have two eleven-year-olds and a nine year-old.

What's the most you've ever kept?

Seventeen was the most. But since my dogs are all housedogs, that's pushing it!

How did you come up with your kennel name?

I'm a biologist and have a special interest in native plants. The alpenrose is a rhododendron from the alpine regions of Switzerland, and the rhododendron is the state flower of Washington.

So you name your litters by an alphabetical scheme?

Yes. I've also had a Christmas and a New Year's litter because of the timing of those, but it really is of benefit to fanciers in the breed to use an alphabetical scheme. It makes it much easier for everyone to identify the background of a dog.

Do you feel that you've established a distinguishable line, and what do you feel people are looking for when they think of your line?

My dogs are particularly strong in several characteristics. They are balanced and sound, have strong toplines and nice heads, and are known for their health and longevity.

How do you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

This is a great philosophical question and much-debated. It really is a chicken and egg discussion, though, because any one without the others leaves the picture wanting. The tendency is to discuss it as if dogs exist in a vacuum, when, in reality, they are a part of society where every facet of human life affects the life of the canine. Theoretically, type is what makes a breed unique, and I believe that one should be able to look at a silhouette of a breed and be able to recognize it, which would mean type should be the most important thing.

However, by virtue of their domestication, dogs interact with the human culture around them. Because of this, temperament has to be of the greatest importance, with physical soundness a close second. Without soundness of mind and body, we would not have a dog that could do the work he was bred to do and we wouldn't love these dogs the way we do. If you take away enough type, you also have a dog that cannot perform his original function, but there is more leeway in this aspect. You really can't have one without the others, and excellence can only be achieved by attention to all three.

What's your long-range goal in breeding dogs?

At this point, I am interested in maintaining the best of type and soundness we currently have in the breed, and improving longevity and health. A shortened life span is all too common, and a big concern is that many Bernese Mountain Dogs die of cancer and immune-mediated problems at four to six years of age. Some breeders say there is nothing we can do about it – that you can't breed for longevity. That's like saying you can't breed for orthopedic soundness. One is as possible as the other. There are some lines that are definitely

Alpenrose Pfefferneusse, Chester (Ch. Alpenrose Farms Free Spirit x Alpenrose Illusive Dream).

healthier and longer-lived than others. We CAN improve the overall health and life span of the breed. Not easily, because it must be a long-term goal, unlike many of the traits desired in the show ring where improvement is observed within the first years of a dog's life. It's a matter of where you place your priorities. Like any other trait, you can breed for it by making it a top priority. I've lost dogs at a young age, but for the most part, my dogs are living ten to twelve years, and there's no reason why a good, healthy Mountain Dog shouldn't live that long. I don't believe it is wise to focus as heavily as some do on the grade of OFA certification. Of course, we want clear hips, but to further screen for only OFA "Excellents" when so many dogs are dying at four to six years of age seems counterproductive. Excellent hips are worth more to a dog as he ages, and if he never gets past midlife, most dogs won't benefit from those perfect hips. Again, one must look at the whole dog in making breeding decisions and not focus everything on only one part of the package.

Education is also very important to me, and is the only way to improve the negative aspects, the downside, of purebred dogs and breeding. We need better education about the breed for the general public, for new owners and for potential breeders. But first and foremost, we need to educate the general public about canines and dog ownership, regardless of breed. We are swiftly reaching a point in this country where there's a huge gap between "dog people" and the rest of the population. With today's busy lifestyles, there are a lot of folks who have no business owning a dog, because they have neither the time nor the interest to work with a dog so that it becomes a welcome member of the family and of society. Most Americans grew up with a dog, and many consider it a right to own one and have it take care of their children and teach them a wide variety of lessons, from the facts of life to responsibility. Issues of dog overpopulation and behavior problems are, for the most part, issues of public ignorance and the misunderstanding of dogs and the realities of ownership in today's world. Sadly, the animal shelters and humane societies are filled past capacity with examples of this.

Ideal conformation – could you describe your interpretation of the ideal dog of this breed?

The ideal Berner is a balanced dog; large and sturdy, and appearing square, although his actual proportions are slightly longer than tall (in a height to length ratio of nine to ten). He is neither a tricolored Australian Shepherd

Abby, 1982-1994.

nor a tricolored Newfoundland. He is recognizable as a Bernese Mountain Dog without looking at markings or color. He is a dog of moderation – moderate front and rear angulation, length of pastern, shoulder layback, and so on. This moderation is important to keep in perspective because it enables him to be the versatile dog he was bred to be. As an all-purpose farm dog, he should be capable of pulling a cart and doing some droving work, as well as maintaining a presence on the farm as companion and watchdog. He would be built differently if he were only a draft dog or only a drover, but the moderation of his structure enables him to excel at all of his tasks.

Why do some dogs look good standing and posing, but not so good when they move?

A posed dog is not utilizing his body the way he does when he is moving. If you have bad knees, you may be able to stand quite admirably, but if someone asked you to walk or run, your shortcoming would be immediately apparent. It's no different in dogs. There are lots of specific reasons why a dog may fall apart when he starts to move – it can be a conformation incongruity, lack of balance between front and rear, a hereditary defect such as elbow dysplasia, or injuries which have caused chronic or acute problems.

How should a dog move in the front, and from the side?

Facing page: Ch. Alpenrose Farms Free Spirit, "Fred," at nine years. 1987-1996.

U-CDX Alpenrose Charles Dickens CDX CGC, pictured at five years old.
Owners: David and Lisa Baldwin, and Suzanne Hostetter.

Movement should be judged at a slow trot, the working gait for this breed. If a dog needs to be raced around the ring to look good, he does not have correct movement. There should be no wasted motion. The gait should be clean and true without deviations from the forward direction of movement – no elbows flapping, topline bouncing, toeing out or in and no extended kick out the rear. Coming toward you and moving away, the legs should be straight and, at higher speeds, tend to converge toward the center line. Cowhocks are common in the breed, but much less so than in the past. Worse, to my mind, are the barrel-hocked dogs we sometimes see now. The rear should be broad, with no bowing in or out at the hocks.

There should be good reach and drive, with balance being very important. A powerful gait should not be interpreted as a fast gait, but rather as an efficient gait that looks "easy" for the dog to maintain. If his body is struggling or "working" just to maintain his movement, he would be a poor choice for a farm dog that must do a variety of chores requiring a dog with strength and endurance.

Should one see wide rear movement, with hocks parallel, or a tendency to single-track?

Standing and walking, the hocks should be parallel, with the tendency to single track at higher speeds.

What are you looking for in a head?

The head should be broad, with a fairly flat skull and moderate stop. The eyelids should be close-fitting and oval, with a nice dark eye. Good earset is important to the overall look of the head and the base of the ear should be level with the top of the skull when the dog is alert. The ears are moderate in size and should come to no more than the corner of the mouth. There should be a distinct difference between the male and female head. Markings can play a big part in the overall look of the head and expression, and I most prefer a moderate blaze and muzzle band set off by a deep rust color. All of these things impart the look of intelligence, gentleness and confidence which is a hallmark of the breed.

How serious are missing teeth?

We see missing teeth occasionally. It seems to be more of a problem in some lines than others. Several specialty judges have mentioned seeing this and it's something that bears watching. I've not had problems with

Ch. Alaska Dancer von Alpenrose, "Alice."

missing teeth, and I think we have other problems that are much more serious. As with other traits, though, we need to be aware of this, keep an eye on it, and not double up on it in breeding programs.

How important is eye color?

Eye color adds to the overall picture, or detracts from that picture. This trait changes the expression of the dog, and a light eye is less pleasing. But as a fault, it cannot be prioritized in the same way as temperament or structural faults. Eye color has less to do with pulling a cart or being a good farm dog than does health, orthopedic or temperament problems, and we need to breed these dogs based upon the function they were originally bred to perform.

How important is pigment, and would you breed to a dog that had any missing pigment?

Pigment is important, but lack of pigment is not a problem in the breed. Puppies are born with pink noses that turn black as the puppies age. Sometimes the pigmentation takes awhile to come in, but I've never seen a Mountain Dog that did not have black nose pigment as an adult. I would prefer the lips to be completely black, although there are sometimes a few spots of pink that remain. This is related to the amount of white the dog is carrying, so by keeping an eye on the white, I believe we are preventing big pigmentation problems. This is another trait to watch, but not of major concern at this time.

Have you had any experience with winter nose?

Yes, but this is seasonal, and the nose darkens up again every spring. I have had some older dogs, too, that tend to have a fading of the black pigment on their noses as they get to be ten or eleven years old.

What should be the relationship of chest depth to the rest of the dog?

The chest should reach at least to the elbow.

Has it been your experience that coat is very important to winning in the ring?

Yes, it is, and more so now, as the breed gains in popularity and there are more dogs in the ring. Much of what happens in the conformation ring is based upon what catches the judge's eye, and a full, shaped coat in excellent condition is a sight to behold. That does not mean it's correct! I think it's hard not to be overly affected by some of the enhancing characteristics of this breed. And coat is definitely one of them. But the Illustrated Standard is quite clear in saying that these dogs are working dogs, not to be changed by the development of too much coat or other features that are more in line with the show ring than on the farm.

Anyone evaluating this breed needs to put hands on the dogs and ascertain that what looks good from a distance is real and not just lots of coat and/or grooming. These are supposed to be sturdy, large dogs and coat and grooming should not be hiding any lack of body or substance, which a working Bernese Mountain Dog needs to perform his function.

What is an ideal front – a 45-degree layback of shoulder with a corresponding layback of upper arm, or a moderate front?

The standard calls for the front to be moderately laid back. There should be equal length of upper arm and shoulder blade, and balance of the angulation front and rear.

What would you consider an ideal croup dropoff?

Moderate croup dropoff is what is called for in the standard. There's that moderate word again. (laughter) One thing you notice, when you go through our standard, is that everything is desired in moderation. You don't want the croup too steep or too flat, as this effects the tailset and rear angulation and balance.

Could you describe the correct topline, and is it functional or for beauty?

The correct topline is level from the withers to the croup. This is for function, but it's also beautiful! (laughter) There's nothing nicer than to see a good solid level topline on a Berner. Functionally, in order to do any sort of work, whether it's draft, out in the fields, trotting down the road or over rough terrain, a firm level topline allows for the greatest efficiency of energy.

What's the ideal height of a dog and a bitch?

For me, it would be the mid-range within the standard. The standard for males is 25 to 27.5 inches at the shoulder. My ideal male would be 26 to 27 inches. For females, the standard is 23 to 26 inches, and a 24 to 25-inch female is my ideal. Rather than having the primary focus on height when discussing size, substance should be most important. If the dog is within the standard range, exact height is not nearly as important as whether the dog is substantial and well-built for his size. We have a lot of leggy Berners that are quite tall, but lack the proportions correct for the breed in height to length, depth of chest and breadth of body.

SERVICE DOG

Alpenrose Farms Xanadu at eight weeks. Photo by Tami Winner.

Sugarfoot's Alpenrose Firefly at eight weeks. Breeders: Cheryl and Jim Dickson.

What's the ideal tail length and set?

The total length of the vertebrae in the tail should be at least to the hock. We do have a problem with overly high tail carriage in our breed, because of the tailset being too high. The tail may be carried gaily, with an upward swirl, but should never be carried over the back.

What's the ideal ear and earset?

The ears are set high on the head, and when the dog is alert, the top of the ear is level with the top of the head. The ears should be of moderate size with the lower tips extending to the cheek and not longer, like you would see on a hound.

What is the ideal foot, and should a dog with bad feet be used?

The ideal foot is compact with well-arched toes. That's what is needed for a working dog, especially over rough terrain. As far as whether a dog with bad feet should be used, I haven't seen a lot of dogs with feet that would concern me. This, as with other faults that are not currently a big problem in the breed, needs to be watched and bred away from.

What is the ideal temperament in the breed?

The ideal temperament is a very cheerful, sensitive, intelligent dog, who is mild-mannered and very devoted to his people. He is an excellent companion. He may be reserved, but is not shy. He is self-confident and gentle. This temperament is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the breed and we need to preserve it.

I used the term "reserved," and should say more, since it has been used to describe a variety of behaviors, as has the term "aloof." These are very different in meaning than "shy." To me, they describe a dog that is not overly friendly – he does not back away, show hesitancy or fear; rather, he shows calm and confidence and a discerning nature about whose feet he chooses to sit on.

There is currently a tendency to breed for a more outgoing, assertive and less sensitive dog, which is one that will be more likely to do well in the conformation ring. But this is incorrect for the Bernese Mountain Dog, and that is what we are breeding, not an American Mountain Dog. Our

Clockwise, starting with Brando (has bow), Missy, Amelia, Konig, Alice, Val and Abby, Christmas 1984.

commitment is to protect and better the breed as described in the standard. Standards are concise statements written by folks with intimate knowledge of the breed described. We need to do more than define the words on the page – we need to look at the history of the breed and the function of the dogs, and to understand canine behavior so that we can better interpret what the standard is describing.

What is the most serious fault in the breed today?

A poor temperament has to be the most serious fault.

What is the most common fault?

The most common faults are in the front assembly. The fronts have been a problem in this breed for as long as I can remember. They're getting better, but we still have a long way to go. We've made a lot more headway in correcting other faults, such as those of the rear end, but fronts are more complex and harder to understand and fix.

Is the standard a good one, and are there things you'd like to see changed in it?

There's always room for improvement, but as standards go, it's a fairly good one. As students of the breed, we can all use it very effectively. I've heard some judges say that it is not specific enough, and others seem to think that it says markings are most important. This is worrisome, because markings are the frosting on the cake, and they are not of much value without a good, solid Mountain Dog underneath. The "rule of thumb" I've used in assessing the markings is: if you glance at a Bernese Mountain Dog and his markings look correct, then they are acceptable.

The first paragraph of the standard summarizes the major points of importance for the breed. As far as markings, ours only mentions "tricolored" and "striking." This doesn't mean markings are not important, just that in the overall picture, the finer details of amounts of white, width of blaze, etc., are not as important as those qualities specifically addressed in the opening paragraph. Following through with this, though, of temperament, it says only "intelligent." I would like an additional adjective describing this. Intelligence can be interpreted in many ways, and more input is needed here.

Should there be any disqualifications?

Yes. In addition to the AKC disqualifications for all breeds, we have two: a ground color other than black is a disqualification, as is a blue eye. These are appropriate disqualifications, but I don't believe further disqualifications would benefit the breed.

Should champions be specialed?

Competing as a champion for Best of Breed has merit, but I believe purebred dogs would be better off if the competition stopped there. Competition at the Group level seems to have evolved into a different sport. We're

Suzanne and Fred, 1996 Specialty Veteran's Parade.

Alpenrose Farms Fascination at nine years.

Fritz.

seeing more and more group-placing Bernese Mountain Dogs in the breed, and I question whether they are the best representatives of the breed. They are beautiful canines, of that there is no doubt, and they are a joy to watch, but whether they represent the type, temperament and movement of a successful working Bernese Mountain Dog is a big question.

Does making the Top Ten or Twenty mean anything?

It means advertising and lots of time, energy and money spent showing the dog.

Would popularization help or harm the breed?

Overbreeding is already occurring. To the uninitiated, it appears you can make a lot of money breeding Bernese Mountain Dogs – they cost a lot and it seems everyone wants one. But to breed ethically, one must spend a lot of time and energy evaluating breeding stock and not breeding the prospects that do not turn out to meet the breeder's criteria for quality. As a breeder, you also need to provide a guarantee for each puppy and stand behind it. You need to be there to answer questions, mentor and support your puppy people throughout their dog's life, which should be ten to twelve years. And you need to take responsibility for every puppy you produce for his lifetime. If one of your pups no longer has a quality home, it is your responsibility to take the dog back and care for it. You choose the owners you place puppies with, and this must be a careful, well-thought-out choice.

Further popularization will take its toll on the breed. We are currently going through a great surge of popularity, and, while I think this is a wonderful breed, they're not the dog for everyone. They are beautiful and are great dogs, but they are big and shed heavily and have many drawbacks. Anyone thinking about having one

Fritz.

needs as much information up front as possible – both pro and con. We have a fairly active BMD rescue group in our region. We have seen adult Berners offered free in the newspaper and appearing in the shelters. Unfortunately, this is a trend that has occurred in other breeds as their popularity skyrocketed.

I no longer suggest that people go to dog shows to learn about the breed. People need to know what Berners are REALLY like, what they are like when owned by the average person, not when they're owned by breed fanciers who spend most of their waking hours training, grooming, researching the best products and better ways to do things. Most pups do not end up in this environment, even if they are expected to at the time of placement. Dogs at shows are clean and groomed, well-trained, optimally maintained and well-mannered. Of course everyone wants a dog like that! But they don't come that way – it requires a lot of time and effort. I recommend that people go to club meetings and other informal gatherings of BMD owners, and also visit Berners in their homes. Our regional club, the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Greater Seattle, has open meetings with dogs most months of the year. There, people wanting to know more about the breed can see dogs in various stages of life from puppyhood to old age, and in various stages of training, grooming, condition, and health, as well as a variety of pedigrees. This is a great opportunity to discuss all aspects of the dogs with owners and fanciers who can offer a much wider perspective of the breed. This environment is much more helpful to someone wanting to learn about the breed than the dog show, where exhibitors are busy and nervous and the dogs are in a very unique atmo-

Brando at two-and-a-half.

Ch. Alpenrose Farms Jubilation CD, "Johann." Working Dog Parade, 1996 BMDCA Specialty.

sphere that does not necessarily indicate what a Berner will be like in the real world.

Do you think judging is fair, and are there things that could be done to improve it?

Judging is as fair as any other subjective type of evaluation where no reasons for the choices are required. Each judge came from an original breed, and this affects how they view and judge other breeds. You get to know which judges like your line of dogs and which ones don't, and show accordingly.

The BMDCA provides judges' education seminars. In the judging seminars I've been involved in, most judges come knowing what they like. Some of that may change during the seminar, but not a lot. As far as ways to improve the process, we need to do more at the owner/breeder/fancier level. It is extremely important that we offer the same sort of educational opportunities to all Bernese Mountain Dog folk, not just judges. That would change what we give the judges to look at in the ring. I'd like to see us do more discussion groups at the specialties, and more activities in which information can be shared between breeders and fanciers. The Internet has become a very positive factor with regard to this. It has opened up communication between different regions of the U.S. as well as with the rest of the world. With fanciers of varying backgrounds and knowledge, it gives the opportunity to pose questions and contribute responses to a forum of Bernese fanciers worldwide.

Would you rather show under an all breed judge or a breeder judge?

Definitely a breeder judge. Breeder judges better understand the priorities of a particular breed – which qualities we are trying hardest to improve, which ones are harder to fix, and which ones are most needed in the breeding population.

Do you think that poor judging is more the result of politics, or the fact that a lot of judges don't know the breed?

Most often it is a lack of knowledge of the breed. I would like to think there are not really that many political judges out there at the breed level. I do think the judging at AKC shows leaves a lot to be desired. I'd like to see us go to some sort of system like they have in Europe, where written critiques are given for each dog that is entered. It would be more of a learning experience for everyone, whether you're an exhibitor or just watching from ringside, or even as the judge, to hear a critique of the dogs and a comment as to why one dog was put up over another. I enjoy watching the livestock judging at the fair because it is a straightforward assessment of why each placement was chosen and why the first place animal was superior to the second; and so on down the line.

Does advertising influence judges?

Yes.

Do you always show your own dogs?

Not always. I showed my own dogs for the most part, but I am certainly not a good handler. It is a lot easier to finish a dog with an experienced handler than as an owner unless that owner enjoys handling and trains to become adept at it. The conformation ring is, for me, sort of a "necessary evil." Competition is not my interest. I love the dogs, the behavioral aspects and the challenge of the genetics more than the conformation ring. The AKC conformation ring is becoming more and more a performance event – the dogs are trained for the competition, they are conditioned for it, groomed for it, etc. It is no longer a showcase of breeding stock. It is important to participate in it because it is the accepted method of comparison of one's own dogs with everyone else's. And it could be a great learning tool if exhibitors knew when they left the ring why their dog and all of the others were placed the way they were. But it is only one aspect of the dog – the exterior phenotype. The judges have no knowledge of any dog's pedigree, health problems, or certification status unless the severity is great enough to affect the presentation of the dog. And with today's technology, way too many faults can be hidden in various ways. It is also very hard to successfully judge a dog in the time allotted – the human eye will be drawn to the flashy one, the trained one, the well-presented one. It is human nature. It is a beauty pageant, and as such, it's a good one, but the relevance to assessing breed quality and picking stud dogs is questionable.

Do you train puppies, and at what age?

Bernese Mountain Dogs are intelligent, and are definitely capable of learning every day of their lives. It is really important with a big dog like this that you start training them before they get bigger than you (laughter). There has been a lot of work done by behaviorists that show that a dog that learns things before four months of age has a greater capacity to learn in the future. They "learn how to learn," so to speak.

When I place a puppy, I recommend that people start with the basics the day they bring the pup home. These guys respond very well to praise and food, and just using meal times, within a few days, a pup will sit on command before his food is put down. Within several weeks, you have trained him to sit, to wait, and to down simply by using mealtime as a positive motivation. With this foundation, the pup is ready to learn all kinds of things.

As far as formal training, it depends upon the type of training. I believe that all puppies will benefit from a good puppy kindergarten class, that is, one that teaches basic techniques, using positive motivation. It's a good way to introduce training to folks, to reinforce the bond that is forming between owner and puppy and to hopefully prevent bad habits from developing. There are many training methods today, and the old "jerk and pull" methods are no longer recommended. Methods using positive behavior modification are extremely successful and, especially with Berners, result in a happy, willing companion.

Do you attend fun matches or training classes?

I do both, but I'm not currently involved in either one.

Do you believe in obedience training?

Ch. Yodler's Konig v. Bernerhof CD, 1976-1988. (Ch. Grand Yodler of Teton Valley CDX x Gerta v. Buttonwillow). Breeders: Diane Russ and Harriet Rector.

Yes, definitely. Formal obedience training (like "my dog can heel next to me all the way around the ring") is not as important as going to classes and getting the dog socialized around other dogs and people, and getting basic social skills for that dog. Bernese are big dogs and they need to be good members of society.

Have you done any tracking or agility training?

I haven't done any tracking and I admire folks who do, because it takes a tremendous amount of time, more so than any other training activity. I have done some agility, but just for fun, not competitively.

How intelligent is this breed, compared with other breeds?

They are very intelligent. Years ago, people used to say they were very stubborn and slow, but this is not so – they are very sensitive and highly intelligent. What they don't like is negative, forceful training. When someone trains with heavy-handed methods, Berners do become stubborn and unresponsive. With the advent of positive training techniques, Bernese have begun to shine! It is important to look at intelligence with respect to what the dog was originally intended for – these are not dogs that willingly repeat exercises over and over like some other breeds. These dogs must be able to think a little more in order to perform their duties – as watchdog, companion, drover, and draft dog. There is an intelligence about them that goes far beyond doing perfect

Sunny. (Alpenrose Sunbear v. Harlquin). 1985-1993. Breeder: Kelly Kilroy.

exercises in the obedience ring.

Do you feel it's appropriate to take a dog anywhere off leash?

For the most part, no. Dogs that are highly obedience trained do work off leash. But they are trained for the specific circumstances. For the most part, there is no reason and it's much safer not to. Dogs that are absolutely reliable can be gone in a flash because something caused them to stray from their normal pattern. It's not worth it. There are many areas that are fenced and are big enough for any dog to exercise to his heart's content. Maybe I would feel differently if I lived in the city and didn't have six fenced acres for my dogs and me to romp on. But I have heard too many stories of dogs that "just once" didn't respond as the owner expected and were gone – hit by a car, lost, or killed.

How important is training to winning in conformation?

It's extremely important. Certainly, you need to start out with a nice dog, but there is no doubt that training enhances the performance of any dog you put in the ring.

Can shy or aggressive dogs be corrected by training?

It would depend upon the reason for the problem, but many can be corrected. A lot of the shyness and aggression problems that I've seen are people problems – created by miscommunication between owner and dog, and many of these can be remedied with proper understanding of the dynamics involved. It is important to remember, though, that there are both hereditary and environmental components involved in shyness or aggression, and both need to be considered.

Should a handler be used, and does a big-name handler help a dog to win?

If one enjoys handling, it is wonderful to see owner-handlers in the ring. There was a time when it was all owner-handlers in the Berner ring. Now, there are many professional handlers in there. I've seen a lot of dogs that would have done a lot better if their owner hadn't been on the end of the leash – including my own. (laughter) Dogs finish faster with someone who knows what they're doing and what the various judges expect. As far as winning more with a big-name handler, sure, every little bit helps. In some cases, it probably makes a difference. I would hope that, for the most part, judges are looking at the dog, trying to evaluate the best the dog has to offer.

Can you give any specific advice to owners who'd like to handle their own dogs?

Do it because you enjoy it, and be sure your dog enjoys it, too. Everything you feel about the experience goes right down the lead and has an effect on the dog. It isn't fair to the dog if it's not a positive experience.

Do you feel that a breed should do what it was bred for?

I feel it should be capable of doing what it was bred for. It would depend upon the breed, as far as whether what the breed was intended to do is still applicable in today's society. Today, in the United States, there aren't a lot of people who use Bernese for their original function of an all-purpose farm dog (although part of that purpose is as a watchdog and companion). Bernese DO need to be capable of doing the draft and droving work they were bred for – they must have the conformation, temperament and soundness to do this work. It is the reason we need to look farther than the conformation ring for our breeding stock – because the show ring does not require the soundness, temperament, conformation, or constitution to be a successful working Bernese Mountain Dog. The dog that can do the work he was bred for is correctly conformed and many times would be a better representative of the breed than the average highly coifed and successful show dog.

You have trained your dogs over the years – what have they taught you?

The dogs have taught me much more than I have taught them. (laughter) They have been the light of my life, each one is so different, and yet all Mountain Dogs are so much alike. They've taught me patience and unconditional love. They've also gotten me to think about what's truly important in life, and the fact that competitions and egos and all of those sorts of things are not nearly as important as the quality of life of every individual, be it human or canine. It's how you relate to your dog during his lifetime that's important, not how many ribbons he's won or how many titles he has.

Do you do breedings, or consider pups from breedings, with obedience performers in mind, or do you feel that most dogs from any line do fine in obe-

Ch. Alpenrose Farms Abby CD, "Abby."

"Gambit," Alpenrose Farms X-Man, at eight weeks.

dience, given the correct training?

Bernese are working dogs – all-purpose farm dogs. Given the correct upbringing and training, I can't imagine one that wouldn't do well. If someone is interested in the highest possible scores, there are differences in the lines, and we do have lines that are bred for a temperament and/or size that probably would do better in the obedience ring. We also have dogs that have temperaments that excel in the conformation ring. This does not mean that either is the correct temperament for a Bernese Mountain Dog. I am a strong believer in preserving the Bernese Mountain Dog breed – we should not change the temperament, conformation, or any other qualities just because the breed would do better in some sort of competition. We are custodians of the Bernese Mountain Dog, a breed developed in Switzerland to be an all-purpose farm dog.

How and at what age do you start working with a puppy, and could you include early socialization?

With my puppies, socialization in some form starts the day they are born. It is really important to do early work with puppies – from day one making sure they are handled and learn to know and trust the smell of humans. Giving young pups small stresses that they immediately recover from instills trust and confidence and a view of the world as a secure place. I follow the techniques discussed in *How to Raise a Puppy You Can Live With* by Rutherford and Neil. During the first couple of weeks, this is essentially picking the pups up and cuddling them, holding them securely and rotating them a different way each day, rubbing their fur "against the grain," things like that. As the puppies get older, socialization remains key to developing a well-rounded dog. It is especially important for Bernese to be socialized by the breeder and for socialization to continue after the pup has gone to his new home. They were bred to be farmer's dogs, and that includes being reserved around strangers. This is the correct temperament, but without proper socialization, it can develop into a shy or overprotective dog, which has no place in today's world. We need to make sure that our dogs are good members of society and not a liability

Fred, nine months old.

due to lack of socialization.

Is there an age that is too young to do real obedience training with a puppy?

I guess that depends on your definition of real obedience training. Many years ago, when training was all by the Koehler method, with choke chains and lots of popping corrections, yes, young puppies especially could not handle that sort of thing. But with today's positive methods of training, where the dog learns with positive reinforcement, you can work with any age dog.

What obedience method do you practice?

Oh, it's a combination – I use what works for me and my dogs from a variety of methods. I believe in training with praise and food. Bernese want nothing more than to make you happy and if they can get a little praise and food at the same time, you've made their day!

Which level of obedience do you enjoy the most?

With Bernese, I've never gone beyond a CD. I've put a UD on one Sheltie and a CDX on another and have competed in the Gaines trials. I have found that with a Bernese, it's more fun for me and for the dog to stop at novice work and spend our time on other activities after that.

Do you think intelligent breeds are easily bored with Novice exercises?

(Laughter) I think any dog can get bored with Novice exercises, if there's lots of repetitious practicing. You need to make sure there's lots of variation in the training, and make it fun. I get bored with a lot of repetitious training, too. (laughter) It's a lot more fun for handler and dog to do a variety of things and work the formal training in with it.

What exercise do you find is the hardest, and which is the easiest, to teach most dogs, and why?

At the Novice level, I've had the most problems getting a nice heel position. Being working dogs and draft dogs, Berners seem to have a tendency to be a bit behind their handler. I showed Shelties in obedience before I had Bernese, and I enjoyed the precision work and competition. With my Berners, I have done obedience for fun and I don't train for absolute precision – it is impressive to watch, but not what my Bernese and I enjoy doing at this point.

Do you have a funny, or maybe embarrassing story to tell about your dogs in obedience?

(Laughter) Oh, I can think of several! The most humiliating was with my very first Berner, that clown named Konig.

To set the scene, I'll tell you a story that will, I'm sure, hit close to home for many an owner of young adult male Berners. Konig was an intact male (my first) with raging hormones and a mindset that included the knowledge that every tricolored animal was a female Bernese that needed his services desperately. When we moved to Washington State, we had ten acres and our neighbor raised cows. Shortly after we moved in, there was a black and white cow down by the fence line, about a quarter of a mile away. Konig spotted that white blaze on a black head, and he was off. He thought his fondest dream had come true! That was the first time I really realized how agile and quick Berners can be. Well, he got down to that fence and put on the brakes REALLY fast! He lost a lot of his amorous intentions when he got up close to that cow – the look on his face was priceless!

Well, anyway, Konig had two legs on his CD, and the 1981 Specialty was coming up. I thought, "How wonderful. They have a special award for dogs finishing their CD at the specialty. I'll wait and get the final leg there." I'd had Shelties, you see, and thought I knew a thing or two! So we went back to Wisconsin for the Specialty, and Konig had a wonderful time schmoozing with all the other dogs. We got to the obedience ring, and he did his individual exercises quite well. He had passing scores and I was very proud of him – all we had to do was the long sit and longer down. Piece of cake, right? Well, in we went, and it was a big class, so there wasn't much space between the dogs. He was next to another male Berner. We left the dogs on the long sit and by the time I reached the other side of the ring and turned around, I was mortified to see Konig leaning over, as far as was caninely possible, whispering sweet nothings and kissing the ear of the dog next to him! The woman next to me was fit to be tied, so afraid her dog would break! It seemed like an eternity before the judge said "Okay, go get your dog." I was so embarrassed – but even more so when the judge came up after the exercise and said, "You don't REALLY want to do the long down, do you?" (laughter) Needless to say, Konig did not finish his CD that weekend, although I believe the dog next to him did!

How many degrees have you put on your dogs?

I think I've put CDs on three or four Mountain Dogs.

What do you do about a sloppy sit?

Grin! (laughter) I just don't take it that seriously anymore. I want my dog to be truly obedient, and this doesn't have much to do with perfectly straight sits! I have seen many top obedience dogs that, once they got out of the ring, were neither obedient nor fun to be around. This is not what I want for my dogs or any dog. I believe that the relationship you build with your dog is much more important than how straight the sit is. For those into precision work, that's fine, but I don't think it has much to do with an "obedient dog."

Are your breedings natural or controlled?

I am always present and keeping an eye on things, in case help is needed, but I prefer the breedings be as natural as possible.

Do you help a mating along?

Yes, when necessary.

What is a fair stud fee, and should it be the same for a proven and unproven dog, regardless of titles?

A "fair" stud fee is one that is determined based upon the merits of the stud. It should include many factors, including: whether he is proven, whether he is a champion, what certifications he has and at what age they were obtained, the quality of the puppies he has produced, and his pedigree. A proven stud dog with nice get on the ground who is eight years old, certified clear of hip and elbow dysplasia after age eighteen months and clear of PRA within the last year, with good temperament and health along with good conformation, a pedigree indicating these qualities and longevity in his lines is worth more than money can buy.

Are your males at stud to outside bitches?

I have used my males sparingly on outside bitches. Stud owners unfortunately learn "the hard way" about who they can trust to do right by the puppies their stud produces. I feel very strongly that those of us who breed are responsible for the puppies we produce. The primary responsibility is that of the breeder/owner of the bitch. But if this responsibility can not or will not be met, then it falls to the stud owner to take responsibility for puppies produced that may be in need of help. For this reason, a stud owner needs to screen carefully those breeders she works with in addition to the careful screening of the bitch for the Berner qualities desired to pass on to the next generation.

What faults would keep you from breeding a dog?

Certainly, a dog with a disqualification should not be bred. And serious faults need to be viewed as such. But one must look at the whole dog and not make a decision based upon any one fault.

There isn't a dog out there that is absolute perfection. All dogs have faults themselves and also are capable of passing on faults they themselves do not exhibit. The overall quality of the dog, the strong points in relationship to the breed are more important. That is, a dog who is slightly cowhocked, a beautiful topline, and average or above in other ways, might not be a candidate. But if one had strong rears in the pedigree and was trying to improve toplines, this might be a trade-off worth looking at. Whenever breeding becomes "black and white" in dealing with polygenic traits, we lose as much as we gain. For recessive traits such as PRA, there is no question – it is black and white because the trait can be dealt with. But most traits are not so simple to resolve, and concentration on any one will logically lead to less stress on other traits which must be considered just as important.

Have you handled many matings?

Quite a few.

How many litters should a bitch have, and what's the youngest and oldest they should be bred?

Three or four litters maximum. That gives one ample opportunity to try different combinations of pedigree, and, by that time, you know what she is producing. If they are nice, you move on to the next generation. If they are not to your liking, why would you want to breed her again? A lot of bitches probably only need to be used once. The question is not: she is healthy and has all of her titles, why not breed her again, but rather, she's had three litters, what will the breed gain by putting more of her offspring on the ground? If one is breeding for improvement, then some of her daughters should be better quality than she, and they should be bred instead.

As far as the age for breeding bitches, certainly one should have x-rayed all breeding stock prior to breeding. Generally, one would wait until two years of age, and it would be dependent upon the maturity of the bitch. To be accurate, radiographs need to be done no earlier than eighteen months of age. Preliminary radiographs before this age are helpful, but not always accurate – the hips, particularly, can still change, and the breeder must know as much as possible about the phenotype (since we cannot know the genotype) of the dam and sire. So eighteen months would be the minimum age for breeding and six or seven years old would be the maximum age.

Do you help your bitches whelp?

Yes. As with all other aspects, I like the whole reproductive process to be as natural as possible, but I am always present at the whelping and would not allow a bitch to whelp alone. Too many things can go wrong.

Do you supplement feed very young puppies?

Only with a large litter or if there is a puppy that for some reason is not thriving.

Do you tube feed or use a bottle?

I have done both, but tube feeding is more effective. Either way, one must be careful that the pup does not aspirate milk into the lungs.

Do you wean puppies or let the bitch do it?

A combination of both. Mom is there to feed them as long as she will allow them to suckle, and I start providing supplemental food by three to four weeks.

At what age do you evaluate your puppies for pet or show quality, and what do you look for?

It's an ongoing process that starts when the puppies are born. You can see markings when they're born, and get a general idea of body type. I spend a lot of time just watching the pups every day – their vigor, how they use their bodies as they nurse and how they interact with the rest of the litter. Then as their eyes open, and they begin to get up on their feet, more and more becomes evident. At four weeks, I take them one at a time and evaluate conformation, checking the withers and prosternum, front and rear angulation, how they stand and stack, how they move, what their toplines are doing and also how they react to the world around them. After this point, it's daily evaluation to see how they're progressing. I find that the four week evaluation is a good "first cut" in identifying those pups that will go to loving homes as companions on spay/neuter contracts. It is too early to make definite decisions on show and breeding stock, but the angles, shoulder placement, body length, etc., are evident even this early. Between seven and eight weeks you can really pull all of the information together on each puppy and start making firm decisions.

Do you cull?

Yes, in the sense of removing lesser quality pups from the gene pool by spaying/neutering. We are lucky to have a breed that makes wonderful companions and rarely would there be a case where a breeder would not be able to find a home for a healthy puppy, regardless of faults such as markings, eye color, etc. Every litter has variation in quality, and the idea is to keep the best to influence the next generations. Pups that are not better than their sire and dam or that do not meet the breeder's conformational criteria should be placed as pets on a spay/neuter contract and limited registration. They should not be sold as show quality just because they have correct markings or "should be able to finish."

What should a show puppy sell for?

There is a wide variation in prices, and no one right answer. I believe that each pup should be individually evaluated and priced accordingly. There is a range of quality within every litter and there should also be a range of prices, dependent upon the qualities of the pup itself, as well as those of the pedigree and relatives.

Do you sell on terms, or cash only?

I will take payments on a short-term basis. I work hard to pick people that I trust and that I believe are capable of giving my puppies happy lives. If it's easier for them to make payments over several months, that's fine.

Do you sell pet puppies with spay/neuter agreements?

Yes; I use a spay/neuter contract as well as placing them on limited registration, so that there is no question as to what was intended.

How about puppies back when you sell a bitch?

When I place a puppy bitch as show and breeding potential, I ask that I receive a puppy back IF she is bred and that I be involved in the decision as to the stud that is used. I do not require people to breed and I do not think it is in the best interest of the breed to do so – raising a litter is a big responsibility and a lot of work to do it well, and it should be done by folks who are interested in becoming breeders, not just someone forced into it by a contract. I do believe, though, that asking for a puppy back from a bitch one has produced and one that is nice enough to be bred is reasonable and allows for lines to continue to evolve without having to keep every pup yourself. Each breeder needs to mentor all her puppy owners, especially those who wish to breed. If each generation of breeders takes the responsibility for guiding the next generation and helping them become knowledgeable, ethical and responsible, the breed and canines in general will be the winners. We have found in BMDCGS rescue that the dogs that come to us are almost always bred by someone who has herself not had adequate counsel and has little understanding of the significance of her choices. These people were not given adequate knowledge/mentoring by THEIR breeder in order to make good breeding decisions, choose quality studs, socialize puppies and find good quality responsible homes. It is every breeder's responsibility to keep this from happening.

At what age should puppies be placed?

There is some controversy over that. I prefer to place puppies between seven and eight weeks of age. If not by eight weeks, then not until after ten weeks. According to the behavioral studies that have been reported by Pfaffenberger and others, the seven to eight week period is the best time for a puppy to change environments and to bond to its new family. With a good, solid temperament, the exact timing probably doesn't matter, but I believe in following the optimum course whenever possible. I know many breeders who do not place pups until ten to twelve weeks, and I think that there are sometimes good reasons to do this. In Bernese, with the incredible growth in the first few months, the longer you keep them, the more you can tell about their conformation and future show and breeding potential. This is great for a couple pups that a breeder wants to hold on to. But this may be offset by the degree of socialization and education each pup receives during that time. My number one goal is to place each puppy as a companion in a home where he will be loved and cared for throughout his life. The showing and breeding aspects must be secondary. Breeders need to understand their limits – a litter of eight-week-old Berner pups requires a lot of care, and they grow fast and are very sensitive to their environment. Most breeders cannot do as good a job of making sure that each pup gets continually socialized and introduced to new skills as can the new owner. Placing them at seven to eight weeks puts them into their new environment at the optimum time, they begin bonding with their new families earlier, begin their education at a younger age and at a time when their personalities are more adaptable. This sets them on the best path for life's journey. But pups should not be placed before seven weeks of age.

How important is diet in raising this breed?

Feeding a complete and balanced high quality food is very important in all stages of life, and particularly in the growing puppy. Where the dog is healthy and problem-free, it doesn't make that much difference which brand is used, as long as it is a premium product. Each dog's system is slightly different and there is no one food that is right for all Berners. The important thing is that the nutrient content is in a biologically available form and that it is in correct balance for the stage of growth. A healthy dog does not need supplements. However, there are many dogs out there with allergies, digestive problems or other special needs that require supplementation and/or a special diet. It is important to start with a good quality diet recommended by the breeder and to closely monitor the dog's health. What is desired is a diet that maintains an active, alert dog with healthy skin and haircoat while not allowing the dog to become overweight (one should always be able to easily feel the ribs). At this point in time, a lot of people are feeding an all natural raw diet or variations of that. It is believed that this diet will improve the health of dogs, particularly those not doing well on kibble. I have been blessed with healthy, long-lived dogs that have eaten kibble all of their lives and have had few health problems. I am much more comfortable continuing to feed this, since I know it is complete and balanced and has had no observed ill effects on the health and longevity of my dogs. I guess that's a tactful way to say "If it ain't broke, why fix it?" (laughter)

Do you feed any supplements?

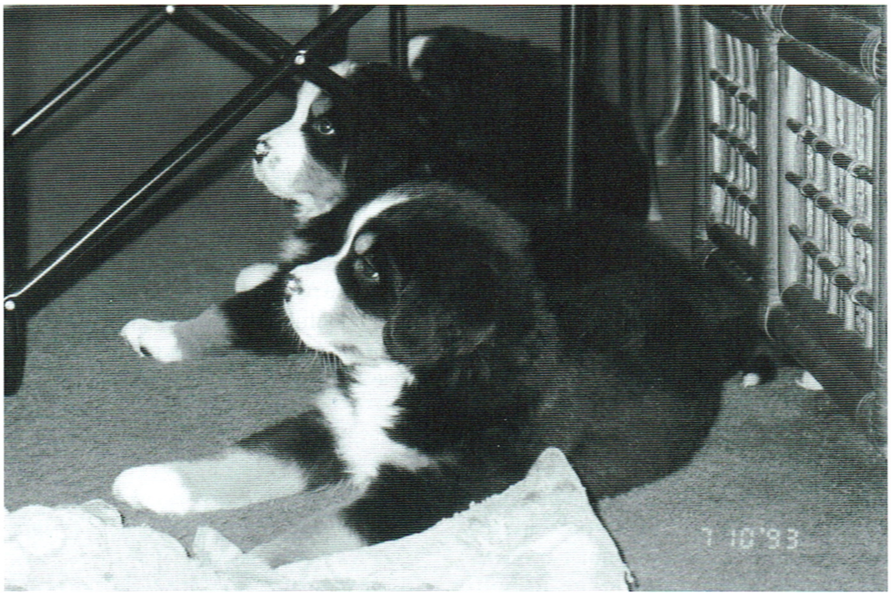
For the most part, no. With a premium food that is complete and balanced, extra vitamins and minerals are not needed, and can actually throw the nutrient levels out of balance. My geriatric dogs (Rosie and Fritz are eleven years old and Lucy is nine) do get a vitamin supplement and Lucy, who is dysplastic, also gets extra vitamin C and Glycoflex. My dogs also get hard-boiled eggs and raw veggies frequently.

When showing this breed, how much grooming should be done?

Not as much as is done most of the time. (laughter) The dogs should be clean, and the feet and ears need to be neatened up, but other than that they should be shown naturally and should not have a sheared appearance. The *Illustrated Standard of the Bernese Mountain Dog* discusses this and says they should be presented "without ostentation or elegance."

How do you kennel your dogs, and what's your setup like?

Bernese do not do well as kennel dogs, so it's very important that they are members of the household. I do have four kennel runs, but don't use them much. I have six different large yards for my dogs to romp and play in, and walking trails throughout the six acre property. This house has a daylight basement, and the downstairs is totally devoted to the dogs: there's a grooming area and sleeping kennels, as well as a whelping room, office and large family room. My dogs are house dogs, and all get lots of house time upstairs to see what's cooking, schmooze with the cat and friends, and sleep next to the bed a couple nights a week. Ideally, these guys should be with their people all the time.



The "S" litter at seven weeks old.

Can adult males and females be kept together?

Yes. Obviously not when a bitch is in season, and if one has multiple intact dogs, you have to use some sense – once males have been used at stud, when a bitch comes into heat, I separate the males because I try to avoid trouble whenever possible!

How important is animal husbandry?

If you are referring to taking good care of your dogs, keeping up with good maintenance and health practices, feeding quality food, giving each dog personal attention and a loving life, it's very important. But I always think of it with respect to livestock breeding. Dogs are companion animals, not livestock. With Berners, especially, it should be part of good husbandry to treat each dog as a companion, with personal attention, training and socialization; with house time and loving attention, not a life stuck in a kennel run or a back yard. They are working dogs and need to be members of the family with a purpose in life other than existence, procreation and competition.

What advice would you give breeders who are just starting out?

Breeding dogs is a very big responsibility and not to be taken lightly. The days of doing it "for fun," to teach kids responsibility or show them the miracle of birth, for ego, for money – these are long past. In this country, canines are getting a lot of negative press. There are huge problems with overpopulation, and the ramifications of indiscriminate breeding and poor training. There are a lot of folks out there who are anti-dog, and it is every dog owner's responsibility to change the situation. It is very important that breeders just starting out realize that they are responsible for each and every puppy they produce for as long as each pup lives. And they also bear a responsibility to any offspring created by those produced puppies. They are responsible for what those puppies grow up and do. If a breeder has not taken care in placing each puppy in a good home, or even if the breeder HAS taken care, but things fall apart, that person is responsible. If a male grows up running the neighborhood and creating mixed breeds, it is as much the breeder's fault as it is the owner's – the owner may be ignorant, but the breeder knows better, or should. It is her responsibility not only to recognize the problem, but also to be proactive in doing something about it. It's a big responsibility that needs to be taken seriously. It is important that if you are going to breed, you make it a serious commitment and realize you are in it for the long term, not just the time span of a pregnancy and eight weeks of raising puppies. EVERY puppy needs to be sold with a contract and the breeder must be willing to mentor every owner they place a puppy with, whether that pup is breeding potential or a companion with a spay/neuter agreement. The breeder must be willing and have the knowledge to help each new owner throughout the life of the dog – to answer questions, to act as guide and mentor. This is every breeder's responsibility and it is a major commitment.

Should they go to a kennel with big winners to purchase a pup?

It is most important to do your homework in the beginning, not to take the easy way out and assume that the well-known big winner has the best dog for you. There are many priorities in breeding and each person must decide what his priorities are and find a breeder with similar priorities. There is a lot of information available on the breed now, with many books written by people from several countries, as well as regional clubs with educational opportunities, and a wealth of information on the Internet. Prospective buyers need to get information from a variety of sources and then choose a breeder. Almost as important as the potential pup's pedigree is finding someone you're comfortable with, that two years or five years down the road, you will be able to call and they'll remember your name and will have the time and interest to talk with you openly and honestly. Whether that's a big kennel or an individual having a litter only once every two years, doesn't matter.

Would you recommend joining a local club, a national club, and/or an all breed club?

It depends on where your interests are. Everyone who buys a Bernese Mountain Dog puppy should initially join a local or regional club because it is such a great source of information and education. Berner fanciers are much more aware of the details of the breed such as growth and development, training, etc., than are veterinarians or all breed trainers. It's good to have a support system of other people in the breed to bounce things off of. For someone interested in the more serious aspects of being a fancier, the national club is a must, and then for specific activities, clubs geared toward those interests are important. Certainly, if your interest is in conformation, showing and handling, an all breed club is important, too.

Do you feel the parent club is doing enough to educate judges and new members?

Yes, I think they're doing a good job. I think there is always room for more education. The club has grown quite a bit over the last decade, and we're now relying on the regional clubs more to help with that education in order to reach more people than the national club can by itself

Is there an AKC video on this breed, and is it a good one?

Yes, there is. The original AKC production on the BMD was a slide show, and that was then updated to a video presentation of the slide show. A second video was made several years ago. I still prefer the older version, even though there is no movement. I believe it leaves a more complete impression of type and purpose than does the newer one.

Do you think there's adequate literature – books and magazines – on the breed?

Yes, we're getting more all the time. We have a couple of very good books out there now. I would love to see the national club get behind an effort to translate the Swiss book written by Bartschi and Spengler. It's a fantastic resource, but is written in German. It has a wealth of information on genetics as well as other aspects of the breed, and it would be nice for everyone in this country to be able to do more than look at the pictures!

How did you end up in Rochester?

I was born and raised in southern California, and moved to Washington in 1979. I love it here. I especially enjoy the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest. And it's definitely not as populated as California was, even back then, (laughter) and that I love, too! I enjoy nature and the ability to have dogs and other animals without worrying about the neighbors.

I moved to Issaquah, Washington, originally. That's up in the Seattle area. But when it started to grow, I moved to Rochester, which is still a small rural town. This is southwest Washington. It has the beautiful evergreens common to the Pacific Northwest, but is a bit drier than Issaquah, and also has the big oaks that remind me of California. Add to this the space to enjoy my dogs plus the ability to get to major cities, or the beach, or a National Park within a two hour drive, and I'm in paradise!

What have you done for a living?

I'm a research biologist. My degree is in environmental biology, and I'm currently working in the timber industry in reforestation.

Are you, or have you ever been, married?

Oh, yes. (laughter).

How have dogs affected your lifestyle?

Certainly, most of the people who visit here are dog-oriented people. (laughter) The dogs can't help but affect the amount of "character" my home has! They've definitely had a very positive influence in teaching me so very much about what is truly important in life. I wouldn't trade the dogs I've known and the lives I've shared for anything.

Have there been drawbacks?

Well, they tend to limit your ability to get away. I'm always looking for a good housesitter. (laughter) The only other real drawback is, even though my dogs have been very long-lived, their lifespan is short and it's so very hard to lose good friends.

Has it been worth it?

Oh, definitely.

Is there anything we haven't covered, or any soapboxes you'd like to get on?

Oh, I think I covered most of them. (laughter)

Thank you!

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about these guys! It's a privilege to share my experiences and talk about this breed that has been such a major part of my life for over twenty years. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Alison Jaskiewicz

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Alison Jaskiewicz
Mason, New Hampshire

This interview was conducted at the home of Alison Jaskiewicz in February of 1998 by Jeannette Nieder.

How long have you been in dogs?

It depends on how you define "been in dogs," because I grew up with dogs, as many of us did. We usually just had one dog in the house. The one I remember the best was the Golden Retriever we got when I was in the seventh grade. After I got married, we both knew we wanted dogs. At the time we were living in an apartment and couldn't get one. We got our first Bernese Mountain Dog in 1984. I guess you could say that is when my involvement with dogs began.

What brought you to the Bernese Mountain Dog?

I had a Golden Retriever when I was growing up and my husband had a Dachshund. For a number of years we went to the benched Boston dog shows every December. We walked among the benches and met a number of breeds and their owners and breeders. We also read a variety of books.

How did you find your first dog of this breed?

At the Boston show we spoke with several breeders. We got several names of people that had litters on the way. I called one of the breeders, and found out she had a litter of four puppies, all girls. We had decided we wanted a male, so I called another breeder. Coincidentally, the litter was being whelped when I called! That's where we got our first dog, from Eileen Brouck in New Hampshire.

What made you decide to show/breed?

Kepler, Ledgewood's Warning Barque, and I.

We had seen the dog shows in Boston and were somewhat intrigued by them. Obedience is what really got me involved. I took Kibo, our first Bernese, to obedience classes. I was hooked! We had bought him as a breed prospect, but that didn't work out. We ended up getting a second Berner a year later from Eileen. She had a puppy that she liked very much and wanted us to have on a co-ownership basis. Shira was the first dog that we were able to show in conformation.

Have you done any breeding?

I have had one litter.

How did you go about planning that litter?

I worked a lot with Shira's co-owner and breeder. I talked with a lot of other Berner owners. I have seen a lot of Berners at the shows, and I evaluated possible stud dogs that way until I narrowed the possibilities down. My first choice was unavailable when Shira was in season, so I went to my second choice.

Have you had any champions from that litter?

No, they were all sold as pets.

Which is the best dog that you have owned or bred?

That is a tough question. There are two that come to mind. Shira was our second dog and was very, very special. She was my first dog to get an obedience title, plus tracking and draft. She just wove herself into our lives so completely. She was a dear and loving dog.

The other dog that comes to mind is Jay Jay, whom we lost last in August, 1997. We went through a lot together. We went through Utility in obedience. We were working on UDX legs and OTCH points. It was with him that I got introduced to freestyle. I also did carting with him, earning his Draft Dog title.

Would you say Jay Jay was your biggest winner?

Yes. He had a very successful obedience career.

What were some of the highlights of his career?

One that comes immediately to mind would be his 200 in Canada. His very first shows ever were in Canada. In a weekend of shows, there were two trials each day. I knew he was good and I had a wonderful time training him, but he really surprised me. It was a perfect venue for a Bernese Mountain Dog – in a hockey arena, where the ice had just been taken out. It was in the beginning of May and it was frigid cold! It was perfect for Berners – we were all wearing our ski jackets inside! Jay Jay loved it. It was the perfect condition for him. In the first trial he got a 199 and a High in Trial. In the second trial he had a 199.5 and High in Trial. The second day he had a 197 to finish his Canadian CD. His fourth trial was a 200. That was very special, because Bernese Mountain Dogs don't get 200s. (laughter) They are capable of it.

I am also very proud of the all-breed OTCH points which he earned, the first, and so far only, for a Bernese Mountain Dog. That led to invitations to the AKC Obedience Invitational two years in a row. We even beat our obedience instructor for a first in Open B at one show with a 198 1/2 and a month later won an AKC High in Trial with a 199 from Open B.

Do you have a kennel name?

I used a kennel name with my one litter. I don't know if I will be breeding again, so I don't know if I will be using it again. It was Tannberg at that time.

How did you come to have that name?

"Berg" is the German word for mountain, and "Tann" is German for pine forest. We live in an area where there were a lot of pine trees, and "Berg" was for the Mountain Dogs.

Do you name your dogs by any certain scheme?

As I said, I have had only that one litter. We didn't use any scheme then. I don't know if I would in the future or not.

Do you believe pedigrees in this breed can be trusted as to accuracy?

I would think so, yes.

How do you feel linebreeding, inbreeding and outcrossing should be used?

There is a place for all three with a thorough knowledge of all the dogs used. Linebreeding and inbreeding concentrate characteristics, both good and bad. Outcrossing can bring in new characteristics, both good and bad.

How do you rate type, soundness and temperament in order of importance?

Temperament has to come first, especially in this day and age. Our dogs have to get along in the world. Even if they are going to be show dogs, they really are pets 99 percent of the time. They absolutely have to have a temperament that will allow them to function. Soundness would come next, because we are responsible for bringing these dogs into the world and we owe it to them. Type would come last. Obviously, if you are showing dogs, you need type. Type is important, but for getting along in everyday life, it doesn't matter what the dog looks like. Of course, anyone breeding for the show ring and trying to possess the perfect dog of any breed must take all three into consideration.

What has been your long-range goal in owning dogs?

The biggest reason we own dogs is for the pleasure of it. I love doing obedience with my dogs, but if someone told me tomorrow that I could no longer do obedience with my dogs I would still treasure every moment with them. I love the walks in the woods and the hugs on the couch. You name it, I love it.

Who or what has influenced you the most?

As a mentor, I would say Debbie Mulvey. We have been friends for a very long time. I feel I have learned so much about the breed from her, and I continue to do so. I co-owned Jay Jay with her, and Gita currently, as well.

Tell us about some great dogs you have come to know in your past. Tell us what made them great.

That is an interesting one to think about, because there are a lot of dogs in the breed that are special. Tina, who was owned by Eve Menegoz from Canada, exuded the essence of the Bernese Mountain Dog. She would stand out in a line of dogs. She was a very special dog. Another is Cita, owned by Kim Behrens, who was outstanding as a puppy, and continues to be outstanding. She had an amazing show career. She earned her championship at two national specialties and then a supported entry where she went Best in Show! She is another dog that stands out in the crowd. She walks by and your head turns.

What is your interpretation of an ideal dog in this breed?

I like a large sturdy dog. I like to think of them as draft horses of the dog world. They were originally used as draft dogs. That helps me to define the body type. Draft horses are big, strong, powerful animals, and I want my dogs to be the same. Draft horses are not quick like a thoroughbred would be, but they don't move heavily either. They have power and drive.

What is the proper movement in a Bernese?

They should move with a slow, powerful trot. They are capable of moving faster, with energy and agility, and should have good reach and drive. As they move faster, coming and going, the legs should tend toward the center line.

Why do some dogs look good standing and posing, but not so good when moving?

The coat can hide a lot, as well as a skilled handler and the attitude of the dog. A hands-on exam will often reveal structural details which are more indicative of how a dog will move. To properly evaluate any living, breathing creature they must be seen in motion.

What is the ideal front for this breed?

The angulation of this breed is supposed to be moderate. There are studies that have been done that show the maximum ideal well-angulated dog is about 30 degrees. It is in that range, and possibly slightly less for a Berner.

Could you describe the correct Berner topline? Would you consider it to be for beauty or function?

A correct topline is lovely and very functional. A good level topline helps transfer the power from the rear legs as they drive forward.

What would you consider to be the

Shira and Jay Jay, Liskarn America Bound Jerry UD DD Can CDX.

ideal croup angle?

I have never thought of the croup in terms of specific angles, so I really couldn't tell you. The standard reads that the back is supposed to be gently rounded in the tailset.

What is the proper tailset?

I would say moderate. The tail is not supposed to be curled over the dog's back. It should be wagging loosely behind them when relaxed and higher when they are excited, but never curled.

What about the length of the tail?

The bones of the tail should reach to the hock or below.

What is the ideal foot?

You want a tight, well-rounded foot.

Should a dog with bad feet be used in a breeding program ?

That would depend entirely on the rest of the dog.

What should be the relationship of chest depth to the rest of the dog?

The chest in a mature dog should come to at least the elbow.

How many dogs have you seen that have a chest depth that we are describing?

This really requires a hands-on exam because the coat can hide the actual relationship of chest to elbow. I would say that many, but certainly not all, Berners approach these proportions.

So, with what you are describing, Berners don't have a barrel chest?

No, definitely not. The rib cage should be well sprung but not barrel-shaped – a wide oval in front view cross section. Again, a hands-on exam is needed to fully identify the structure underlying the coat, which can be profuse, especially in a mature male.

What about the prosternum under all that rough?

The prosternum should ideally extend slightly in front of the shoulders.

Is that a problem in this breed?

Yes, fronts are one of the weaker points.

What is the correct front?

The legs should be straight from the front, elbows and feet turning neither in nor out, and from the side, with a slight slope to the pasterns. The scapula and humerus should be of similar length and moderately angulated. The prosternum should be distinct, bone substantial and muscling should be firm.

What is the correct rear for this breed?

Again, you want the legs to be straight, hocks well let down, and moderate angulation. You do not want cowhocks and/or feet turning out or in. Substantial bone and powerful muscling.

In specific terms, what is the ideal height for dog and bitch?

My preference is the middle to upper end of the standard. For a bitch, the standard says 23 to 26 inches, but I like to see them around 25. The standard says males should be from 25 to 27 1/2 inches, but I like to see 26 inches or more.

If you could rate the whole dog on a point scale of 100, how many points would you assign to the head?

That is a very interesting question. I would say in the range of ten to fifteen. In the overall appearance, the head contributes a lot, but you also have to remember Berners are working dogs. The head doesn't have much to do with that, in terms of shape.

What is the ideal head?

I like a nice, broad – not square – but approaching square head. I don't like them to be as angular as a Saint Bernard. Berners should have a moderate stop, whereas Saints have a very steep stop. I like a good breadth to skull and muzzle, not narrowing to a snipier type of nose. The muzzle should be slightly shorter than the rest of the skull.

What about the planes of the muzzle?

The muzzle should roughly be the same plane as the top of the head.

Can you describe the relationship of the underjaw, the eyefill (eye shape, size and placement) and the earset? How does that contribute overall to the breed?

The eyes should be slightly oval. A round eye is not pleasing to look at. The earset should be high and the ear medium-sized and triangular. When the dog is alert, the base of the ear is raised and brought forward, which will make the skull look wider across the top.

What is the proper size and shape of the ear?

I am practically quoting the standard for you. (laughter) It should be triangular and gently rounded at the tip.

How important is eye color?

The eye should be dark. That is what the standard calls for and it really does contribute to the appearance of the dog. There are more and more Bernese out there with light eyes. If you have ever seen one, you can tell it does detract from the overall expression. The ones that are approaching a yellow in color have a stark and staring look. I have had dogs with moderate eyes that I could live with just fine. I don't think I would like one with a yellow eye. You can get lost looking in a dark eye; the expression is softer.

How important is pigment? Would you ever breed to a dog that is missing pigment or has washed-out pigment?

If you are talking about noses, the noses are supposed to be totally black. Puppies usually have a lot of pink spots that usually fill in. You will see some Berners that have some pink on their lips. It is not ideal, but again, I wouldn't make a breeding choice based on entirely on the lip and nose pigmentation.

Is winter nose a problem in this breed?

Some of my dogs have had noses that have gotten livery colored during the winter. I don't really know how common it is. I wouldn't say it is a problem. The pigment always comes back in the spring. I think it is caused by being exposed to less sunlight.

Has it been your experience that coat is very important to winning in the ring?

The standard does describe a relatively specific type of coat. All else being equal, a dog in better coat should win. In shows that I have observed, I haven't seen any dramatic cases where it didn't make sense. Grooming has become excessive. Bernese should be shown in a natural coat with minimal trimming.

The Bernese have such a unique coat with the inverted Swiss cross underneath the chest. Have you seen a lot of mismarked dogs?

There are always going to be some mismarks out there. Most dogs that have a bad mismark are sold as pets. There are some dogs in the breed ring that some people would consider a mismark. It is a matter of degree as to how it affects the look of the dog and how it is interpreted. For instance, the white muzzle band is not supposed to go back beyond the corners of the dog's mouth, but you will occasionally see that. You would have to look at the other dogs' markings they are competing against. All else being equal, the better markings should win. We have to maintain some type of standard regarding markings, so we don't lose that unique aspect of the breed.

What about coat color? Have you noted any washed out colors?

About ten years ago, there were a few dogs with a little gray in their coat, but I haven't seen that for a long time. One of the disqualifications in the breed is a dog with a ground color other than black, but that is very rare. Aside from muzzle graying in older dogs, the coat color holds very well. Ideally, the rust should be a deep, rich color. I have rarely seen a dog with a pale rust color.

What is the ideal temperament in this breed?

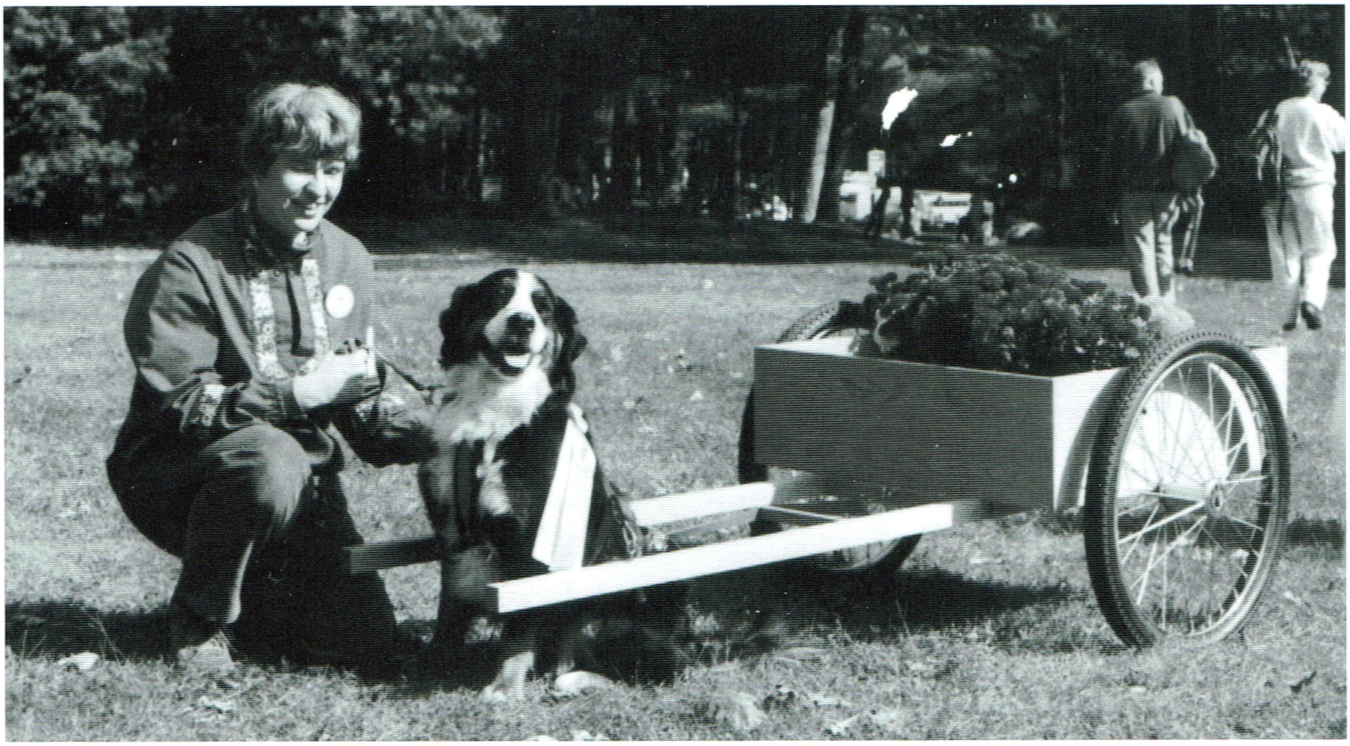
Confident, happy and friendly. You want a dog that is secure in their environment. You have to think in terms of what the dog was originally bred to be. They were bred to be all-purpose farm dogs. The farm dog is going to guard the homestead. They were also used as drovers, so they need to be steady and calm to move the cows from place to place. They were also bred to be carting dogs, which calls for a calm dog. You couldn't have a dog that bounces up and down all the time in excitement do that. That would be a recipe for disaster! (laughter) That is the best way to describe them. The standard says the dogs may be aloof to strangers. You will see some Bernese who will sit down and consider the situation for a while and then they will say, "Oh, it's okay," and dive right in. A dog that is initially aloof with a stranger is perfectly adequate in the standard. Although, in this day and age, people tend to want to breed friendly dogs. There is room for both.

The Bernese is known for being a friendly dog. The dogs of other breeds, that are more watchful, usually come from countries that seem to be in constant war. Do you think that since the Bernese comes from Switzerland, which is a neutral country, it has influenced their temperament?

I really doubt that! (laughter) They are certainly capable of defending their owners. They will bark when a stranger comes into the yard. I honestly don't know if any of my dogs would actually defend me. I had one that certainly put on a good display, but he really never had a chance! There was a situation where the meter reader came to check the electric meter, which happened to be inside the dog's fence. The dog raced up and down the fence and jumped up and down saying, "You will not come in here!" I tried to call the dog to the door, but he would not come in while the meter reader stood outside the gate. I suggested that the meter reader go and do the houses down the road first. I got the dog in the house and the meter reader came back later, and it wasn't a problem. I never had a good feel of whether or not the dog would have followed through on his threat. Bernese are such big dogs, so all they have to do is stand their ground and bark a little. That alone would make most people think twice before doing anything threatening. Berners don't have to be aggressive to serve their purpose. They are not aggressive at all in ordinary circumstances, at least they are not supposed to be.

Could you give us a comparison of the breed today to the breed when you first became involved? What specific changes have you witnessed, and in your own opinion, have they been beneficial to the breed?

In my opinion, the dogs are sounder now. When we first went to the shows in Boston in the early '80s, even before we got our first Bernese, we saw a lot of cowhocked dogs in the



Shira, Ch. Olympians Oracle of Delphi CD TD NDD Can CD, and I at Nashoba Valley Fall Match, 1990.

show ring. The dogs had a little trouble getting around the ring! The temperaments have improved, too. The temperaments back then used to be more standoffish and shy. The breed is becoming more popular now, so we are seeing some of those traits coming back. There are a lot of Bernese being bred that probably shouldn't be. Some breeders haven't learned all they should or don't have the true interest of the breed in mind. The dogs in the ring now are definitely better than they used to be.

What are the most serious faults in the breed today? Are they the most common ones?

Fronts still need a lot of work. Fronts seem to be one of the hardest areas to perfect. Type is improving, but still not well set.

What are the most serious health problems facing the breed today?

Berners are not the healthiest of dogs. Like many of the larger breeds, they have orthopedic problems. I believe the OFA still ranks them in the top ten for hip dysplasia. Bernese were ranked number two for elbow dysplasia. There is a significant amount of cancer in the breed. In the late 1980's, the national club decided we should conduct a cancer study and started collecting data to evaluate. The breeders thought they were losing too many dogs to cancer and we needed to quantify it. The study is ongoing. We have been able to identify two cancers that are genetic. We don't have enough information about them yet to be able to breed away from them. We hope that will come in time after we do more genetic mapping. Also, we have had several recent cases of PRA in the breed. While these cases implicate two well-known stud dogs, if you look at the lines of those dogs they go back to the foundation of the breed in this country. There are not a lot of cases that we know of, but everyone is jumping on the bandwagon to CERF their dogs. I hope we can get on top of it. It used to be we had to only X-ray hips and elbows before we bred, but now yearly CERF exams have be been added to that.

Are there any heart problems in the breed?

I have heard of an occasional case of SAS, but nothing that has been identified as a serious problem in the breed.

Is the breed standard a good one? Would you like to see any changes?

It is basically good. Like any breed standard, every breeder is going to interpret it a little differently. There is no way to absolutely and completely quantify the essence and structure of a breed. The standard lays a good foundation for it.

Do you think that breed standard should have disqualifications?

It is a good idea to me. There are some things that should be totally discouraged! (laughter) For instance, in Bernese, if the coat is brown rather than black, it should be disqualified. The last thing we need is for people to think the brown Bernese Mountain Dogs look nice, because they will start breeding them! (laughter)

What is the preferred bite in the breed?

A scissors bite.

Are there any problems with missing teeth?

It does turn up from time to time. I don't think it is a major problem, but is something that breeders have to be aware of.

Have you ever shown your dogs in conformation?

Yes. I showed Shira to her championship. I showed Jay Jay off and on while he was maturing. I kept waiting for his chest to drop, but I finally gave up and had him neutered! (laughter) He did relatively well. He only actually earned one point, but he had two reserves to three, four and five point majors. He was a good moving dog, but he lacked in type. We probably could have finished him, but decided there was no reason to. I didn't think he was of a quality that needed to be bred. Some people were coming to me who wanted to breed to him because of his success in the obedience ring. I didn't want that to be the only reason to breed to him. Yes, he was successful in the obedience ring, but there was a lot of hard work behind that. He was not a fast learner. A lot of people saw what I had accomplished with him and thought he had special obedience aptitude, but he was actually a slow methodical learner! (laughter) People wanted to breed to Jay Jay because he was so good in obedience, but I didn't want to start an obedience line. I don't think that will do the breed any good. I didn't think the people were going to get the qualities they thought they were going to get for obedience! (laughter) I really don't think they would have. Yet, ironically, if that was what they believed they were getting they would have accomplished the same. The power of the mind is amazing.

Instead of charging a stud fee, they should have hired you as a trainer, right? (laughter)

I have been very fortunate because I have had very good instructors who have helped me along the way. They have taught me a lot and I continue to learn. I am also a persistent and patient person when I train. I will set a goal in my head and know I will get there. There were times with Jay Jay that I had to be very patient. He took forever to learn the scent articles in Utility. I started with him twice and worked with him for about six months. I put it aside because he was having such a hard time with it. When he finished his CDX, it was really time to settle down and do it. It was another year-and-a-half before he was out in Utility. Go outs also slowed us down. He had to work at his own pace. A good chunk of the time, I was working articles twice every day! (laughter) That was his bugaboo. He simply didn't have a good nose. I did a little bit of tracking with him. He was doing okay, but he wasn't putting his nose to the ground and saying, "Yes, I know what I am after!" (laughter)

When you showed your dogs in conformation, did you handle them yourself?

Yes. I have always shown my own dogs.

As a rule, should champions be specialed?

That is entirely up to the people that own them. Frequently, it is entirely up to the size of the pocketbook of the people that own them! (laughter) That's wonderful, if that's what people want to do with their dogs. The dogs have to enjoy it, too. I don't think we should assume that all the best dogs are out there being specialed. There are many good dogs that finish their championships and go home, because people aren't interested in continuing.

Does making the Top Ten or Twenty mean anything in either conformation or obedience ratings?

It certainly feels good to the people that do it! Otherwise, they wouldn't be out specialing their dogs. They want to say they have a good dog and that is their way of showing it. I like the working and obedience aspects of the breed the best. The conformation people are probably going to kick me for saying this, but to me it means more to rank in obedience than it does in conformation. Obedience reflects more work on the part of the owner to succeed, whereas, to succeed in conformation, much of the thanks go to the breeder. To rank a Bred-by dog would be very special indeed.

Do all breed show ratings affect the popularity of the breed, and does popularity help or harm the breed?

I don't think show ratings particularly affect the popularity of the breed. People see Bernese Mountain Dogs and they are attracted to them. They will say they want a dog just like that. The Bernese has definitely grown in popularity, and it is a concern for people who have been involved in the breed for a long time. There are a lot of new people deciding they want to get involved in the breed, too.

I have been the Records Chairman for our national club since 1989. When I used to go through the AKC conformation results, I recognized most of the kennel names. They had been around for a while. Now, I can look through the show results and 80 percent of the kennel names are new. I have no idea who they are or where they came from. There are a lot more people getting involved in the breed. That is not to say that all these new people are bad for the breed. Some of them are very dedicated to the breed. There are also people who are saying "We've got a dog and a bitch, so we've got a good thing going." They are basically backyard breeders. It's a catch-22 because they are not an inexpensive dog, like all other purebred dogs. People will say, "If that is how much you can get for a puppy, then all I need is a dog and a bitch, and I'm in business."

We have had situations in New England where we have multiple generations of unregistered Bernese Mountain Dogs that people breed. They are getting popular enough, so they are having no trouble selling the puppies. You have to figure that the average pet owner doesn't care if they have a registered dog. A lot of people will get a dog from a reputable breeder, and they will stick the registration papers in a file somewhere. They really don't care, because all they want is a pet.

Do you feel advertising influences judges?

I would have to think it does, because otherwise people wouldn't do it.

Do you think a big-name handler will help a dog to win?

In some cases it can. It depends partly on the judges! (laughter) It also depends on the quality of the dog that is being shown.

Do you ever handle for other people?

I have done it a couple of times as a favor.

What advice would you give to people that want to show their dog? Do you have any training tips?

I don't necessarily have any training tips, but I would suggest they learn as much as they can. They need to read and understand the standard. They need to visit a lot of dog shows, so they know and understand the system of showing. When I first got involved in showing, it made no sense to me at all. I can see now why certain dogs go back in for winners, but when you first get started it is not that simple. They need to find out as much as they can about the breed. They should also find a mentor who knows a lot about the breed. They definitely need to go to classes to learn about standard methods of showing. The classes will teach them about the patterns and procedures in the ring. They will have to teach their dogs to accept having their mouths examined to see the bite, and things like that.

Would you rather show under an all breed judge or a breeder judge?

I would definitely prefer to be under a breeder judge! They understand and know the breed better.

Do you feel judging is fair?

Probably in most cases it is. We all know of cases where we know it was not fair. With ring-side judging, you can't always know what the judges know, because they have had their hands on the dogs.

Do you have any ideas on how to improve the judging?

I would like to see more emphasis on judges attending breed study groups, particularly at the national specialties. That is the best way for the judges to get a better understanding about the breed. They need to go to a place where they can see a lot of dogs and see them from all over the country, because there are definite differences. If the judges go to a national specialty, the best people in the breed can talk to them and explain the fine points of the breed. Then they will be able to go out and see hundreds of dogs and get a chance to put their hands on them.

Do you think judging is more about politics or the lack of knowledge about the breed?

I would think a little of each, but yes, the lack of knowledge in specific breeds. A judge may be approved for the Working Group in which he may know some of the breeds well, but then get approved for the others, and doesn't know the finer points. That is simply because they have not been sufficiently exposed to them.

How important is training to winning in conformation?

It makes a big difference! If you are going to the ring with a dog that is out of control, you won't have much chance. He may be the best dog there, but if you can't make him stand or walk on a leash, you are not going to win. I have seen some dogs that are trained beautifully. It is so impressive to see a dog that will stack on its own, to stand and look gorgeous, while the handler stands four feet away from them. It is a wonderful way to show a dog, with the dog showing himself, but they have to learn to do that. We have to teach them.

Do you attend fun matches?

Oh, yes.

How do you train your puppies for obedience and/or conformation and at what age do you begin?

I like to start training puppies for basics as soon as they walk into my house. You teach them the basics by luring them with food and with a lot of games. I play with my dogs a lot, so they learn how to play with me. That is a wonderful release from the concentration of obedience and conformation training. I want them to learn that training is part of the game. I want it to be all in fun. I do not want them to distinguish training versus play. I want them to think it is all a part of life.

I start when they are little. I hold a piece of food up in the air, and their nose will come up and the rear will go down, and then you have a sit. Gently lift their rear out behind them, and then you have them standing. Puppies are very helpful! They will follow food wherever you go! (laughter) Even in the very beginnings of heeling, you just hold a piece of food by your side. You get them interested and you can take the first few steps heeling with them. They think it is pretty neat, because they are getting a piece of food out of it.

Have you read, "Play Training Your Dog" by Patricia Gail Burnham?

Actually, I just read that book last month. I borrowed it from a friend. I noticed that the book was written in 1980, so it was interesting to see the concept that was around back then. I got involved in the playing aspect of the training when I started to train with Terri Arnold in 1990. That is a very, very important part of her program. She knows it has to be fun for the dogs, too. When I read this book that was written in 1980, I found there were people out there who were doing it already! It is all about keeping it fun for the dogs. If they are not having fun, they are not going to give you their best. You can teach dogs a lot by compulsion, but you don't get the same kind of performance out of them that you get out of a dog that says, "Hey, this is neat!" You can make dogs do things, but it is much more fun to see a dog who has been trained through motivation. Their tails wag and they get a big smile on their face. They really look like they want to be there. That is what I look for.

Can training help a shy or aggressive dog?

Oh, I would think so. You could help the dog to gain a lot of confidence through training. Once you can teach a dog to do things, if they are in a situation where they are uncomfortable, you can tell them they are absolutely wonderful when they do something simple they are told. You can give the dog a treat and they will say, "Wow, I am special! I did that!" That will get them past shyness. It takes time to work through shyness problems. It depends on the dog to a degree. Training can make a big difference in the dog's confidence level.

Training is a good way to get aggression under control, too. It would depend on the degree. If a dog learns to sit when you say sit, it will break the chain of aggressive interaction.

How intelligent is this breed as compared to others?

I would say the Berners are in the middle of the road. They are not Poodles! (laughter) They have a nice average intelligence for a dog. They are very capable of learning. They are working dogs after all.

Do you feel a breed should do what it is bred for?

Absolutely! Bernese Mountain Dogs are generally considered to be a draft dog. After our local club did the 1988 National Specialty in Vermont, we finished up and sat around thinking of what we were going to do next. In the early 1980's, the Bernese and the Newfoundland clubs worked together for a little while to develop draft tests. The Bernese fell out of the loop, and the Newf people went on to develop their draft test. We had a very basic format that had been drawn up, but was put aside. So our local club, The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Nashoba Valley, wanted to see what we could do with it. Initially, we went to the national club, and asked if we could hold a draft test with those regulations. They told us the regulations weren't really regulations, so we couldn't do it! We thought, okay, we will just have a match and try them out. We tried the test and found it needed a lot of work. I chaired the Draft Committee and we spent the next two years developing and fine tuning our draft test.

The first match was in 1989. After the first match, we reworked the rules and had another one in 1990. We tweaked the rules a little bit more and basically put them on a platter and presented them to the national club. The club wanted the test, so the regulations were approved. We had our first test in 1991. Since then, the program has really taken off. There are a lot of clubs having draft tests now.

A couple of years ago, a new versatility award was started, and one of the requirements was the dogs must have a BMD draft title. That is pretty special. It is so nice to see more and more dogs doing what they were originally bred for.

Would you possibly like to do tracking as well?

I enjoy tracking. It is time consuming, but is a great excuse to get out and enjoy the great outdoors. I enjoy the time spent with my dogs.

Shira earned her TD. I trained her for that pretty quickly. I started her in the fall of 1987. We bred her early the next year, but it didn't take. As soon as we found out, we decided we really wanted to track with her at the 1988 National Specialty in Vermont, which was in the middle of May. This happened at the beginning of March. She had just reached the point of beginning to do turns the previous fall. We made that our spring project. I tracked with her at least six days a week, and she took to it like a duck to water. She loved tracking and she loved food. She always got food at the end of the track! (laughter) We were able to get her certified and earned her TD in the specialty.

I had not done a lot with my other dogs until the summer of 1996 with Jay Jay and Gita as a little puppy. I didn't get out at all this past year. I would like to get a TD on Gita. I never got there with Jay Jay. It would have been a long haul with Jay Jay. He just didn't have the nose for it. Shira was a chunky little dog, and she would lean into her harness and go. She would put her little nose down and say, "Yep! I know my hard-boiled egg is at the end!" (laughter) She loved to track for hard-boiled eggs. Gita shows signs of being good at it. After this year's specialty, I will have time for my dogs again.

Jay Jay heeling for Freestyle, summer 1995.

What about agility?

Several years ago, I took a couple of classes with Jay Jay, and he loved it. I set it aside at the time, because I was working on his utility. I decided that I wanted to save all the jumping for obedience work. His Utility title was my primary goal, so I stopped doing agility with him. My husband, Tom, started taking Gita to agility classes. They're both having a great time, so maybe agility will become his project with the dogs.

Do the orthopedic problems for the Bernese cause any difficulty in jumping or do they take to it pretty naturally?

Certainly hip dysplasia or elbow dysplasia could prevent a dog from jumping comfortably, but if they are sound they take to it quite naturally. I didn't want to take any chances for Jay Jay to get injured in agility. There is so much more jumping in agility. Even doing something like the dog walk, it only takes one accident. If the dog falls off, it could end his obedience or agility career. I decided that I wanted the UD more than anything else, so I focused on that.

Most Berners that I know love agility. The ones have a harder time on those narrow dog walks. They really have to learn where their feet are. The smaller dogs slip right over them, and they barely need think about where they are going.

Your club was successful in getting the AKC to lower the height for the Bernese Mountain Dogs, weren't you?

Yes, it was the mid '80s when it was lowered. Actually, new regulations just went into effect at the beginning of this month. Bernese are one of the breeds who were lowered to three-quarters of their height. The change is a good one. It is interesting, because we have a wide range of types in the breed. If the Berner is a large typey dog, then the change is a good one. I want to get my dogs to the advanced classes and I want to keep showing, but there is wear and tear on them. It is probably less important to someone who just wants to get the titles, although you still do a tremendous amount of jumping in training. Gita is a small Bernese Mountain Dog. She turned out to be a 23-inch munchkin. I have to admit, when I get her to the advanced classes, it will be a little embarrassing to have Gita jumping only eighteen inches. She is so agile and athletic that she could sail over higher jumps. Kepler is going to be a big boy! He will probably get up to 110 to 115 pounds. I will be very grateful for the lower heights for him. The wear and tear, in my mind, is the dog coming down and landing on the front. The front takes a beating in any kind of jumping.

It is interesting because the Bernese are now jumping lower in obedience than in agility. I don't know if they will consider any changes in agility or not. They do a lot more jumping in agility than they do in obedience, so there is even more wear and tear.

Do you feel the AKC should develop a policy where the handler can set a range for the height of jumps?

I don't see how such a plan could conceivably be implemented. In regard to a system based on a ratio of height and weight, I know Chris Zink talks about it in some of her books. That is what makes a difference for the dogs. You can have dogs of equal height, such as a Bernese and a Greyhound, but the Bernese may weigh twice as much. That is going to make a big difference in how they jump and in the impact of the landing. A system based on a height and weight ratio would be ideal, but I am not sure how realistic it will be.

Do superintendents at dog shows carry wickets and scales because of standards?

I have never seen a scale at a dog show.

I know, but you would have to realize some breeds have a weight disqualification. How are you supposed to weigh a dog if the superintendent doesn't have the equipment?

It is not an issue with Bernese, because there is no weight or height disqualification.

Have you done any weight pulling with Berners?

No, I haven't, but I know of some people who have done it and were successful.

What types of performance events do you enjoy with your dogs?

I have gotten very involved in freestyle. I could talk a long time about freestyle! I got started in it when my instructor asked me in 1994 whether I would like to be part of a demo that was being done at the Gaines Classic in Tennessee. Unfortunately, during that summer Jay Jay pulled a knee ligament on a walk in the woods. The veterinarian's prescription was four months of rest, which included the time of that particular event. I ended up going to watch the competition and demo with some friends.

The next spring Terri asked me again to do the Gaines Easter Regional in Springfield. I told her I would love to do it, so I spent a week sitting at home listening to all different kinds of music. I wanted to pick out the type of music that I thought would fit Jay Jay. I heeled Jay Jay with the music while Terri watched me. We picked out what we thought fit him the best. We ended up choreographing it very quickly. Jay Jay's music was the theme music from *The Thornbirds* by Henry Mancini. It fit him very well because it matched his natural trotting rhythm. Freestyle music should always fit the natural rhythm of the dog. We practiced very hard and had a lot of fun. I wrote an article about it for our national newsletter. I ended the article with a phrase that went something like, "We would love another opportunity to dance together."

Our specialty chair, for the specialty in Georgia, Renate Buie, called and told me she had heard a lot about freestyle and would love to see a demonstration at the specialty. She wasn't able to find anyone else to do it, so I told her, "Sure, I'll do it!" I even tried to find her some other people. I found some friends from Minnesota to do a duet at the specialty. It was a real eye-opening experience to do the demo at the specialty. Jay Jay was taught to work with his attention on me. We had developed a good rapport together. He was always very focused on me, and I was always focused on him. Then we worked with the music and added movements like sidestepping and heeling on the right, all choreographed with the music. There was a huge crowd of people, because they hadn't seen freestyle before. We finished and they loved it. I left the ring, and people were coming up left and right with tears streaming down their faces. They said they were very moved by it. They were moved by the relationship between Jay Jay and me. When we performed in Springfield, it was in front of an obedience crowd, and they thought of it more like dog training. I did not get that kind of reaction the second time. From a less obedience-oriented group of people, they saw the relationship between me and the dog. They thought it was beautiful.

The next year, 1995, Terri, along with Joan Tennille, were asked by the AKC to provide a freestyle demonstration at the first AKC Obedience Invitational. She asked me if I would like to go, and I leaped at the chance. My friend from Hollis, New Hampshire, brought her Portuguese Water Dog, and we drove out together. It was very well received. There were six different dogs and all different kinds of music. The performances were all different. It is a versatile sport. While I was there, I got to know Joan Tennille better. She had choreographed four of the routines that were done in Memphis. Her professional background is in dance and choreography. She works her Cavalier King Charles Spaniels in obedience. She went to one of Terri's obedience camps, and that was how the connection was made. At the first Invitational, we talked about the potential of freestyle. We then went on our own ways and didn't talk for a while.

That fall, Joan called me and said, "Do you really want to try to do something with this?" I told her okay. We got together a few times and started writing up rules for freestyle. We wanted to make it a sport. We sent out our first draft to about 30 interested obedience people across the country. We incorporated their comments and sent out a second draft. We finally completed rules and guidelines for an organization called the Canine Freestyle Federation that would promote freestyle. CFF was incorporated as a non-profit organization in December 1996. We have had one competition. We are trying to create a new sport.

The CFF emphasis is on the dog. The music should be chosen to fit the rhythm of the dog. The dog should always be the focus of the performance. The next level of focus should be the relationship and teamwork between the dog and the handler. There should be interactive attention between the dog and the handler. It is based partly on equine dressage. The dressage people have a musical kur, which is also called the musical freestyle. It takes all the standard dressage movements and allows the rider to choreograph their own performance to music. That is what we are doing with the dogs. We have based it on heel position and front position, because we want there to be a standard for judging. There is one other organization promoting freestyle. They have rules and guidelines, but there are no specific requirements. If there are no requirements, I don't know how you can judge anything. We tried to establish a standard for judging. We still have a lot of projects to do. People keep asking me where they can find out more about it. It is still so new, there aren't a lot of resources available. The CFF web page at www.canine-freestyle.org is helping a lot. We are trying to gradually get more information out there. It is a lot of work but very rewarding!

I am about to start choreographing a Freestyle for Gita to do at this year's specialty in Rhode Island. I did one at last year's specialty in Colorado with Jay Jay, which I choreographed myself. Jay Jay and I did a lot of demos. I was invited to Vermont to a demo at a dressage event. That was a lot of fun, because Jay Jay's grandfather was owned by Carol Lavell, who was an Olympic dressage rider and bronze medalist. She lives in Vermont. She was the MC at the dressage demonstration day, so I was able to meet her. I had the chance to go and visit her on her farm, and see her work with her Olympic horse. He was a magnificent horse called Gifted. He was a huge horse, apparently larger than most dressage horses. It was a lot of fun! She gave me ideas on some combinations of movements to teach Jay Jay.

Jay Jay holding his rosette for his 200 score in HIT in Canada, 1992.

I have done a lot of different demos and met a lot of people that way. We are gradually getting more and more people interested in the sport. The freestyle demo I did in Colorado this year was done at lunchtime on a Saturday. They almost immediately asked me if I would do it again at the end of the lunch break, because so many people left for lunch and had missed it. The next day, on Sunday, Tom and I were minding our club's Ways and Means table and I got one of the nicest compliments I have ever received. Someone in their club came over and asked if we would do our freestyle one more time just before they started Best of Breed judging. That was very special, so we did it a third time. It was a long drive to Colorado, but I guess it was worth it! (laughter)

Did they catch this on video tape?

We have an official videographer at the specialty each year, and he did tape all three performances. There were also a lot of people doing their own individual tapes. I have a copy of my Atlanta performance from the professional videographer and I appreciate having it very much. Unfortunately, we crossed wires this year. I had written him some details about this coming year's specialty, which included a note asking him about getting a copy of all three Colorado Freestyle performances. Somehow how or another, he never got the note. That was in July and Jay Jay died suddenly in August. I simply couldn't think about it until about December. When I called and asked about it, he had already reused all the tapes. I was crushed, because he had told me he had really good footage of it. He said the last time we did the performance, he had it perfectly set up. I was distraught when I found that out. I have some copies from generous friends, but I don't have all three performances.

Did you put the word out that you were looking for it?

I knew several people that had copies. I haven't ever put the word out. I had the joy of doing it, which is more important than anything.

Through the Canine Freestyle Federation we got an invitation to do a Freestyle demo at the Dressage at Devon Horse Show in Pennsylvania in 1996. We performed just before the awards at the Grand Prix Dressage competition. That was utterly amazing, because it was a huge horse arena. It was night, so it was fully lit with brilliant stadium lights. We were standing just outside the stadium before we went in, and we were in the dark. When we walked in, we were in a brilliantly lit arena. It was a huge dressage ring. We had marked off our area with flower pots, a small area that was 40' x 50' inside of that! (laughter) It was such a huge space. When I first got into it, I felt tiny! One of the most wonderful things about freestyle is once you and your dog know the music and the routine, you meld together and become one. I would start a performance, and it wouldn't matter where I was – it was just me, my dog and the music. It is very special in that way. There is a wonderful connection. There is the creativity of being able to choreograph your own routine and make it what you want. You try to show your dog off as best you can with different movements and development of movement.

It is like compulsories and figure skating.

Yes, and some people have suggested it might develop into something where you would have to do a compulsory heeling pattern with your dog, followed by the "optionals," which would be the Freestyle. Right now, we are running our competitions with just the Freestyle. We are still experimenting to see whether or not it will go in that direction. It is very much like the skating, because of the music. Since the emphasis should be on the dog, we always try to dress appropriately. The costumes shouldn't detract from the dog. There are two different styles of freestyle developing, and one of them has a very heavy emphasis on costumes. In my opinion, it detracts from the performance of the dog if the costume is so overwhelming that your eyes are constantly drawn to the costume! (laughter) That is the saga of Freestyle. We really do want to make it into a sport, and I think we are well on our way.

How far away are you from getting this approved? Are you going to go to the AKC?

We have worked with the AKC. They invited CFF to do demos at the next three Invitationals. We have done demos at AKC shows. Our first competition was at a AKC obedience trial. We got permission for us to be there. We are not specifically looking for it to be an AKC sport, at least not for a while. They are definitely interested in it and they are curious about it. They are willing to let us do demos at the shows, so we will see how it develops. The AKC will want it to be further along before they ever would be interested, anyway. We want to be able to guide it for a while as it matures. We have a long way to go. It is so new, a lot of people haven't even heard of it, let alone seen it.

I have a Berner friend in Germany, Bernd Günter, who does a lot of writing and photography. He took pictures of Jay Jay at the Atlanta Specialty. He got in touch with me afterwards, and wrote Freestyle articles for two European dog magazines, *Schweizer Hunde* in Switzerland and *Der Hund* in Germany. We are trying to spread the word since we started taking memberships. We have a membership of over 100. We have members in England and Australia. We would like it to be an international sport.

Do you feel that most dogs, in any line, can do well in obedience if given the proper training?

Yes, definitely. Owners have to think of what they want to accomplish and figure out their goals. Some people have the goal to simply get titles. It doesn't matter to them what the overall quality of the performance is. They just want the title, and that is fine. It is a wonderful goal. Some people have more time to put into it. I have the time available to me, and I like to spend it with my dogs. That gives me the time to perfect things. I get a great deal of satisfaction out of perfecting obedience with dogs, and I enjoy it. A lot of what different dogs accomplish is a matter of time and the inclination of their owners. Someone who is so inclined can take a dog from any line and do very, very well with it. That is one of the reasons I am so opposed to people breeding Berners just for obedience. What happens is they are tending to breed them smaller, so they get little, light agile dogs.

When you are selecting a puppy for yourself, is there anything specific you look for? Do you look for anything in that puppy to show you it would be a good obedience project?

I love to do puppy testing with them, but none of my dogs have been chosen because of their puppy test results. If the puppy was very submissive, or very shy, or something like that, I would be concerned. I usually show in conformation, too, so I like to find a dog who will be a good candidate. High on my list of qualities I am looking for in a dog is soundness. Soundness is a priority if you are going to be doing any of the working activities. If they don't succeed in the conformation, I still keep them and do obedience/freestyle/tracking/draft, etc., with them. I can be perfectly happy with that.

Is there any difference in the kind of training and socialization in obedience prospects as compared to conformation prospects?

All dogs should be well socialized. Perhaps because I like to do obedience, I start the dogs earlier than most people would. In terms of socialization and getting them out to meet all different types of people, it should be done with all puppies.

Do you think there is an age that is too young to start obedience training or real obedience work?

It depends on what you mean by real obedience work. When I am starting a little puppy by using food to get them to sit, stand, or stay down, I consider that the foundation of real obedience work. It is real obedience work – the beginning steps. The time for a puppy to go to a new home is between seven and nine weeks of age. You should start training them right away. At that point, their little brains are blank slates. What we can feed into those little brains in terms of training and basic household manners is time well spent! (laughter) If we don't teach them ourselves, they are still going to learn. If we don't guide that learning, they are going to learn something that we wish they hadn't.

When you had your litter, was there anything specific you did to give those puppies a good foundation?

When they got to be around five weeks old, we had people come in and visit and handle them. Even when they were younger, we made sure we handled them every day. It happened to be during the summer Olympics that year and we had the four puppies in that litter, so we would each bring a puppy up and watch the Olympics. We would trade off, so we handled them a lot. They got used to being manipulated. I recall I played music to them. We would go downstairs and make noises around them. We would take pots and pans and clang them together. One morning, the puppies were running around and I got some bubblewrap and started stepping on it and popping it. We wanted to expose them to a variety of different noises.

One funny story was when we would watch the Olympics, we had one particular puppy, Mr. Green (we called him that because he wore a green collar), who always seemed to be up with us when Greg Louganis was diving, so we started to call him Gregory. When he went to his new home, we told Joan she could name him whatever she wanted! (laughter) She liked the name so much, she kept it.

Kiwi, at six months – puppy training, December 1993.

I have noticed you are using a lot of commands with your dogs. Can you tell what the differences are with settle, wait, stay and all the others?

Settle is a very informal command that I don't specifically train for. Basically, it means go away and don't be a nuisance! (laughter) It means they can go and play with their brother and sister, or go somewhere and flop down and take a nap, or go in the other room and chew on a toy. In the obedience context, stay means to stay where I am leaving you and the position I am leaving you in, until I return. I use wait in situations where I am leaving the dog, but I am going to call the dog to me. I do differentiate them, but I don't know if the dogs can differentiate between them or not. Anything we can do to help them in situations like that is going to be beneficial.

Do you follow any specific obedience training method?

I have been training with Terri Arnold since 1990. I went to her when Jay Jay was about a year old. I really like her methods, so I have stuck with her. It is very motivational. It has a lot of emphasis on keeping the dogs happy and playing. They learn better when they are happy. Prior to that, I trained up here in New Hampshire. I used the Volhard method, which was a little more like drilling. I actually taught that method for a while. As I began to get out and about and observe more people with their dogs, I saw more people teaching their dogs to heel by holding food. That was not considered an option in the other method. I decided to try something new. I am ever so much happier with the method I am using now.

Are there any methods you feel are not for the best benefit of the dog?

I don't like methods that are heavily compulsive, but 40 or 50 years ago, that is how a lot of dogs were trained. A lot of the training originated from military dog training. That is the method they used, because they didn't have as much time to accomplish their goals. Since we are doing this more as a hobby, there is a lot more room for motivational methods. We don't have to get a dog ready to function in a war zone.

What are some aspects of Terri's training you like? I know she pulls out the footwork, so that you are doing it on your own without the dog.

Terri does emphasize the footwork. It needs to be precise and the same all the time. If you are consistent, it is easier for the dog to be consistent. She works on our posture for heeling and the way we walk. She wants to make sure our momentum is straight forward. If your toes stick out on every step, your body is going to swing from side to side. If you are asking your dog to remain in a constant position and you are swinging back and forth, it makes it very hard for the dog. She is a very detail-oriented trainer. Every exercise is broken down into minute details. Each detail is trained and the exercise is gradually put together. The dogs get a very strong foundation that way. They understand every piece of

Jay Jay retrieving over high jump.

the exercise. In the future, if a piece begins to deteriorate, you go back to the foundation and work on it.

Does the speed in your gaiting pattern have anything to do with the dog's ability to stay in a good heel position?

Moving briskly helps to keep the dog's attention. Most dogs, in a good working trot, are more comfortable moving faster than many handlers move.

What are your goals in obedience?

I plan to have an OTCH on a Berner someday! (laughter) Jay Jay was working on his UDX and OTCH. He was the first Bernese to have all breed OTCH points. I know he could have finished the UDX and probably the OTCH. We didn't have the time. He had four UDX legs. My absolute goal is to get every dog through at least the UD. Jay Jay was my first one! (laughter) Gita will be my next. The UDX is a wonderful title to have. It rewards dogs who are consistent. It doesn't matter if you are precise, but if you can qualify them in both classes in a particular show, you get a leg. I love the precision work. I love perfecting things like heeling, because when the heeling is perfect, it gives me such a wonderful feeling of perfect harmony. There is a total connection between me and my dog. The moments I had with Jay Jay, when we really meshed, are embedded in my memory. It is very special. It is a fun challenge for me to accomplish that.

Do you feel intelligent breeds become bored with the novice exercises?

Dogs become bored with novice exercises because their handlers let them get bored. If the dogs get bored, it's the trainer's fault. If the dog is brighter and gets bored easier, the trainer needs to try even harder to keep them happy and interested. You need to keep them excited about what they are doing.

How trainable is this breed?

They are very trainable. They are a working breed. They were bred to work with people and they love people. A Berner that is isolated from people is a very unhappy dog. Berners are eager to please. They want to do whatever will make you happy. All you have to do is give them guidance to teach them what you want them to do. A lot of people don't realize what their potential is. People think of big dogs as slower and more lumbering. They think that big dogs can't move fast. That perception is slowly changing. They are learning that through motivational training.

Do you feel trainability is due to intelligence or the attitude of the dog?

It is a combination of both, but there are other factors, too. You can train an unintelligent dog, but it just takes more time and patience. It also takes more repetitions. You can train faster if you keep the dog's attitude happy.

What are some obedience training problems that are specific to the Bernese Mountain Dog?

It would be hard to pinpoint any problems that are specific to a breed. It is more likely to be specific to an individual dog. Each dog is going to have certain exercises that will take longer for them to learn. Most Bernese are not natural retrievers. They have to be taught to retrieve, but it can be done.

What do you find the most difficult to teach?

I would say the hardest exercise to teach is heeling. To teach your dog to move in perfect concert with you takes a lot of time to get a degree of perfection. It is very special to get a perfect heeling score in an obedience trial. You don't see it very often. It is interesting, because that is the only exercise where the dog and the handler are working together. Every other exercise the dog and handler work apart.

One fun game to play is to get a friend and take turns by playing dog and handler. Put yourself in the position of the dog and try to heel. You very quickly realize it is not that easy. It is hard to be totally tuned in to your handler's position at all times and to keep your position in one precise place in relation to the handler. It is tough to make the turns and change paces and still not get out of the position. That is why attention training is an important part of obedience. Only with attention do the dogs have a prayer of being precise. Some dogs have attention that is peripheral. They don't necessarily have to look up. I prefer heads up attention. I have seen dogs heel beautifully with their head down and their peripheral vision is on the handler's leg. They generally position themselves relative to the leg, rather than looking upward. I like it when they look upward. I think it is really pretty.

Are they becoming more lenient about the dogs using peripheral vision, rather than upward? A couple of years ago the dogs had to look up, and that is something that really throws off the dog's gaiting pattern.

In terms of leniency, judges are supposed to judge according to the position of the dog in relation to the handler. There is nothing in the obedience regulations, and never has been, that says anything about the dog's attention or whether the dog's head should be up or down. I don't think there are very many judges that are putting their own twist on things.

Are trainers open to that way of thinking?

Most trainers decide what they like best and that is what they train their students to do. If the trainers like attention, they are going to teach their students to train for attention.

There is no doubt the head up position is very different from what a conformation person may want to see. In conformation, you want the head to be focused straight forward, because that is where you get the most accurate front movement. The head up and off to the side definitely ruins the front movement! (laughter)

Is it easier for a dog to keep attention in the heel position, or do you find they tend to lag a little bit more?

It depends on what you teach them. All dogs that you teach attention will try to gradually move forward at heel position. They will twist their head back so they can look you more fully in the face, but that is not heel position. When my dogs try to move forward, I pop the collar just a little bit to pull them back. Sometimes I will tell them "back" just to keep them in position. Once they start to come around and wrap and look up, the rear tends to swing out, too.

One really special aspect to freestyle, which I like a lot, is teaching dogs to work on both sides. My dogs heel on the right as well as on the left. That gives them more balance. If a dog only heels on the left, which most obedience dogs have done for many years, they really develop different muscling on the two sides. If you teach them to also work on the other side, you are stretching out the other side of their neck and balancing them physically. They learn to understand where their body is on both sides of you.

Terri has taught me to maneuver the dogs' hind ends. They learn to make a left turn in place and swing their rear around. They learn the inside circle of the figure eight and are able to swing their rear end in. That is so their bodies stay straight to the handler at all times. Freestyle takes that a little bit further, because we use that maneuver in the hind end, for instance, to teach them side passes, half passes, and pivots. It is absolutely superb conditioning for the dogs. Plus, it makes the training more interesting. They are not learning to just stay in the heel position, they are also learning to maneuver all of their body. They are using all of their muscles, so they are thinking more about their body. They will come to know where their feet are landing and that is what you want.

What are some of the most common handler errors?

One of the most common errors is the handler moving too slowly for the dog.

Do you teach any obedience classes?

I haven't for about eight years. I taught the Volhard method for about three years. It was pretty much a prescribed course with prescribed exercises. I wanted to experiment more with the dogs and that was not an option in that method. I have not felt any inclination to teach since. I wouldn't say that I would never do it again. I am so competitive with my dogs, that I like to teach them all the details and precision. If I were to teach again, I would want to work with people with similar goals. I would find it tough to teach people who just wanted titles. That is not to say a title is not a superb goal, I am just always wanting to make things more precise. I want things to look smooth, and overall paint a prettier picture, which is way above and beyond what you need to get a title.

Do you attend fun matches?

Yes, absolutely. It is really hard, except at a dog show or a match, to find an environment that is filled with a lot of people and dogs. The dogs really do need some time to learn how to work, function, and focus on you during the obedience exercises with all of those other distractions. It is important to teach them various levels of distraction to be able to show in the ring. Fun matches are a great place to do that. AKC Sanctioned Matches are useless, because you cannot help your dog. You simply go through it like a show. If your dog does something that you are not happy with, you are not technically supposed to correct them. A sanctioned match would be like a test. It would be like a real show, except it would cost a little less. I want to be able to help my dogs if they get confused.

How do you correct a sloppy sit?

It would depend on the dog and what his training background was. I teach my puppies from the very start. I teach them a tight tuck-up sit, using food as a lure. I build on it that way. I build muscle memory as well as the mental learning process. If I were handed a dog with a sloppy sit, I would have to know exactly how he was trained, but would most likely start from the beginning using food, just as with a puppy.

Do you have any tips on how to speed up a recall?

You need all different kinds of motivation, whether it be food or toys. Every individual knows what motivates their dogs. They have a favorite toy or game. Sometimes when you are playing with your dogs, they will show you new games. If you are alert to that, you take that new game and use it in obedience. To an extent, you can speed a recall up by force, but that usually breaks down.

Would you need motivation for dogs that move more slowly and hesitantly?

That would go back to their training foundation. One, they probably have never been motivated, and two, their handlers aren't moving fast enough. It is hard to answer that question without knowing the specific dog or knowing the specific reason why he or she might be lagging behind.

You had mentioned that one of your dogs was a natural retriever and likes metal. Do you find it to be a challenge to get most dogs to accept metal?

Most Bernese that I know are not natural retrievers. They don't particularly care about picking things up and carrying them around. When my puppies pick something up and carry it around, I praise them profusely. I tell them they are wonderful, but few of them do it compulsively like many Golden Retrievers do. Gita happens to do it. She will frequently retrieve the food dish and bring it to me. She does it mostly at dinner time, but sometimes she will bring it earlier and say, "Here's my bowl, wouldn't you like to feed me?" (laughter)

Do you use the metal food bowls?

Yes, they are stainless steel. She sometimes will bring in the bowl and let it fall to the floor. That bothers me because it is a loud noise. She will sometimes just play with it for a while. She hasn't done it in a while, probably because I have discouraged it, but sometimes she drops it upside down and she can't pick it up. Then she starts to play soccer with it. That is fine on the carpet, but when it hits the slate, it is exceedingly noisy! (laughter)

Do you show in conformation and obedience at the same time?

I have only done that one time and it was a disaster! Actually, from one point of view it was a disaster, and from another it wasn't. I haven't had many opportunities to do it, but this was with Shira. Shira was my first dog to get a CD. It was the day after she got her CD and I was in Novice A. The superintendent, in their infinite wisdom, had scheduled a precise conflict with my obedience time and the conformation ring. In normal procedure, you go to the obedience judge before the judging starts, and politely ask to be changed to another part of the class. I was a well-trained Novice A handler, but this obedience judge said, "No." I was a wreck! I was distraught and I didn't know what to do for the longest time. I was at the obedience ring and noticed a dog had not picked up. He was obviously absent. I asked the stewards to ask the judge if I could go in that dog's place. They checked with the judge and told me I could do it. I had very little time to warm up. We went barreling into the obedience ring. I had a dog that had done a really nice job for me getting her CD. She was okay on-leash, but she was obviously reading mom's feelings. We got to the off-lead heeling and I went off doing my heeling pattern while she went wandering around the ring. She was oblivious to me and it was so embarrassing. We finished up the exercise and did the recall. It was really quite funny to me, because the judge came over to me and said, "I'm sorry, but that wasn't good enough to qualify." I said, "Of course it wasn't, the dog wasn't even with me!" That was the end of the obedience part of the day. She redeemed herself in the Breed ring, because she got a three point major. We decided she could come home with us. (laughter)

Is that the biggest problem you have encountered in doing conformation and obedience at the same time?

As I said, that is was the only time I have done it. I was a Novice A handler. I might try it again with another dog. At the time I was showing Jay Jay in Breed, I wasn't yet showing in obedience, so it wasn't an option.

Are there any advantages in competing in both at the same time?

I really don't know. The dog needs to be trained for the different kinds of movement. I train them to look up at me and give me attention in the obedience ring. In the Breed ring, I have to train them to keep their heads forward.

How do you handle that? Do you use a certain command, or do they take a signal from the equipment?

It has been a while since I have trained a conformation dog. I do use different equipment. One of the exercises in obedience is the mark, which is a hand signal where I point my hand towards something out in front of the dog for him to focus on. I am going to try to use that technique with Kepler, in conjunction with teaching him to aim his head forward. I am also thinking of possibly teaching him to mark a person out in front of him. For instance, coming back at the judge, because the judge is always there. I will get my husband out there with food and tell the dog to mark. I will teach him to go to that person and he will get food. I haven't tried this technique as of yet, so can't tell you if it will be successful. I do a lot of obedience training, so there will always be a strong inclination for my dogs to look up at me. As I said before, that will throw his front off.

How do you feel about run-offs?

They are really fun! They can be a little nerve-wracking at times, but it is another challenge along the way, I guess. I was taught from the very beginning when I first started training dogs, that no matter how you feel you've done in a class, when the class comes to an end you should warm your dog up, because you never know. I have always been prepared. I have always had my dog warmed up, so I'm prepared when I have a run-off. There have been times when I have been totally surprised by being in a run-off. I didn't think there would be any way. On the average, I have done pretty well in run-offs. I am sure that colors my feelings about them!

Run-offs in Canada are interesting, because both handlers are in the ring at the same time. It is basically sudden death. Whoever makes the first mistake is out and the other person wins. Those are fun, too.

Are obedience judges generally good and well qualified?

Most of them are. I would say there are very few who decide to interpret the rules in their own way. Usually the AKC catches on to that very quickly.

Do you have any ambitions to judge someday?

I might do it someday. I have mulled it over, but I am not ready yet. This year, since I don't have a dog to show, I am going to try to do a little stewarding and maybe match judging. We will see where that takes me.

Have you participated in any of the non-regular classes such as Graduate Novice or Brace?

I have on occasion. I only showed in Grad Novice once. It is not offered very often. I have never had two dogs who were equally trained, so I have never done Brace.

What about the Versatility Class?

Versatility is a fun class. I only had the chance to do it once with Jay Jay at a club match. It was a lot of fun. Versatility shows up even fewer times than Grad Novice. I would do it anytime I have the chance to, if I have a dog trained through the utility.

What is versatility?

Each dog that goes into the ring for versatility does a combination of novice, open and utility exercises. They do two exercises from each class. It is usually done by some type of draw, so you don't know when you walk into the ring the exercises you are going to do. It is a lot of fun and I think it is a lot of fun for the dogs, because it mixes up the exercises. They are doing things out of order, and so many times the dogs will get pattern-trained.

Do you belong to any obedience clubs?

Right now, I belong to one – Old Colony Obedience Club in Danvers, Massachusetts.

Do you feel every dog should be trained in obedience?

Absolutely! Every dog should be trained to have at least the basic household manners. The more a dog is trained, the more places they can go, and the more things you can do with your dog.

Do you think it is appropriate for a dog to be offlead?

In some very specific circumstances it is appropriate if the dogs are under control. For instance, we live on a dirt road that has very little traffic. Just down the road, there's an old railroad bed that is now a trail. The rails have been taken out. I do take them down the road and let them off their leashes part way. There are some trails in the woods where I also let them loose. I don't do it unless I know they are safe. One of the best ways to exercise a dog is by letting them run loose, especially out in the woods where the ground is uneven, because they are twisting, turning, and adjusting to the terrain. They use all their muscles that way. Plus, it is good for them mentally. I call it "just being a dog." They need to have fun by running around and sniffing whatever they want.

Do you think every conformation dog should have at least a CD?

It would be a good idea, but I am not holding my breath! (laughter)

You mentioned a story earlier about being a conformation and obedience participant at the same show. Do you feel that is your most embarrassing story?

It would be for obedience! (laughter)

You have only had one litter, but have you helped with any breedings?

No, I really haven't. There was one other breeding that happened to take place here at the house, because I had gone with a friend to pick up the dog at the airport. We stopped by here on the way home, and the dog and bitch were ready! (laughter) That is it though. I have very little experience in breeding.

Gita and I doing Freestyle at the 1998 BMDCA National Specialty.

Would you breed to a dog that had one serious fault, but was outstanding in other areas?

It would depend on the dog and the bitch. It is conceivable. There would have to be very special circumstances. I would have to know as much as I could about the inheritance patterns of that particular fault and where it came from in the line.

Which faults would keep you from breeding to a dog?

Any of the known inherited traits that we can track reasonably well. I would be hesitant to breed to a dog with hip or elbow dysplasia. I would definitely avoid a dog with PRA, or is known as a PRA carrier.

Is it a good idea to breed to a top winning dog regardless of pedigrees?

No, as with any breeding, you have to look at the two dogs who are involved. You have to look at their virtues and their faults. You also have to study their pedigrees, so you know what is behind both dogs. If the top winner fits, that's fine, but I think there will be some dogs who won't fit and you can find a better match elsewhere without the dog being a top winner. Like I said before, there are a lot of good dogs who are not campaigned. You just have to look harder to find them.

How many litters should a bitch have and what is the oldest and youngest the bitch should be bred?

I wouldn't want to breed a Berner bitch until she was at least two years old, because they are not fully mature until that age. Plus, I would be looking for OFA clearances. There is the GDC registry out in California that will certify hips and elbows at one year of age, but I don't think that is a good idea. They are an open registry, which does have some advantages, but there is research that shows significant changes can occur between the ages of one and two. I would definitely breed the bitch until she was six. After that age, it would depend on the bitch. There are not very many Berner bitches that are bred at the ages of seven or eight. With a lot of people, it depends on if they had a litter before. A lot of people think an older bitch should not be bred for the first time. I don't have any specific experience for myself, so I would go to other people for advice.

Did you help your bitch whelp?

Jay Jay pulling, spring 1994.

I had one litter, and I was definitely there! (laughter) I would have helped her if she were having problems.

Would you supplement feed in very young puppies ?

If they were not getting enough milk or sufficient nutrition from their mother, I would definitely supplement feed.

Is there any product or recipe that you know of that you would recommend?

I know there are a number of products and I have seen recipes, but I couldn't really recommend one.

Did you wean the puppies yourself, or did you let the bitch do it?

I had to wean them, because the bitch got mastitis when the puppies were four weeks old. It broke my heart, because the puppies wanted to nurse so badly. I would have preferred them to continue to nurse for a few more weeks. I had just started getting them used to eating. It was very entertaining! (laughter) They had already been introduced to solid food. I put a t-shirt on mom, so they couldn't get to her. I used the regular diet that I used for my dogs, put through the blender, and they got used to it very quickly.

At what age or ages would you evaluate a puppy for pet or show quality and what would you look for?

The best age is between seven and nine weeks. I would look for a puppy that wants to stand and move naturally and cleanly. I want an overall pleasing outline, that will approach what the adult dog should look like. That is the best age to be looking at them. If you wait until later and start getting into adolescence, you come across a lot of unpleasant and ugly stages. Between seven and nine weeks of age, they are relatively compact, but fairly similar in form. You have to know what the parents look like and what is behind them, too. I have seen puppies that looked like they were going to be very nice, but indeed, as they got older the faults began to show up. In order to evaluate well, you have to know the lines. Each different line matures differently.

What should show puppies sell for?

There's a trick question! (laughter) Obviously, most people price them partly upon the show career success of the parents. The standard price of a show puppy is relative to the stud fee. I would hesitate to say what a puppy "should" sell for, because it has to be an individual decision. A lot of purebred dogs have gotten very expensive, and I think it is detrimental. It lures some people into the breed because they think they can make money. It also means there are some wonderful and loving families out there who can't afford them. Again, Berners have their share of health problems, so you would have to be able to afford to take care of them, too. It can be very tough. On average, they are selling for about $1,000.

If you were selling puppies, would you sell them for cash only, or would you consider payment terms?

It would depend on whom I was dealing with and how well I know them. More and more breeders are finding it hard to be confident of whom they are selling the puppies to, especially when they are newcomers to the breed or to dogs in general. There seem to be some unscrupulous people out there who know all the right things to say. Then they will turn around and sell it again, or it will turn up in a pet shop. Being a breeder is hard and I don't consider myself to be a breeder. I have had only one litter, and one litter does not make me a breeder. I don't have a strong desire to become a breeder. I love the breed very much, but I don't have the desire to take specimens of the breed to mold and improve. I am thankful there are breeders out there who are willing to put in all the work to produce puppies for those of us who don't want to breed. If I have a good bitch someday I will probably co-own it. I would be happy to breed her for someone else's breeding program.

Should puppies be sold with spay/neuter agreements and/or AKC limited registration?

Oh, absolutely. You should always do that with the ones you know are being sold as pets. It will limit them, but it won't completely stop people from breeding them even if they can't register them.

How important is diet in raising this breed?

A good well-balanced diet is important for any breed. Most people have found that rather than feeding the high protein puppy foods, it is better to raise them on adult foods. Puppies grow so fast anyway, and rapid growth can lead to problems.

What do you feed your dogs?

I make my own food for the dogs, which I have been doing since I bought my first Berner. My dogs have thrived on it. I am fortunate to have the time to do it. We prefer to only have two dogs, so it's not like I have to cook for a kennel full of dogs. The diet I use now was prescribed for some of my dogs by a holistic veterinarian.

Is it similar to Dr. Pitcairn's book?

He has a huge variety of diets. I feed mine cooked chicken, yogurt, brown rice, and fresh vegetables with a few supplements.

Do you steam-cook the fresh vegetables?

I chop them up and feed them to the dogs raw. I usually feed them carrots, broccoli or beans.

What supplements do you feed your dogs?

I give them vitamin C, B-Complex, vitamin E, multi-vitamin, and with puppies I use small amounts of bone meal.

Do you have minerals in your multi-vitamin?

It's mostly just vitamins.

When showing this breed, how much grooming should be done?

Minimal! It says in the standard to use a minimal amount of grooming. Berners are a natural breed that should be shown that way. It is not done that way, though. They get long fuzzy tips on their toes that need to be trimmed off. They also get long streamers on their ears that need to be trimmed. Now you see so many dogs that are blown dried and scissored, and I find it appalling. I went into the grooming area at the specialty a few years ago. There was so much fur on the floor and chalk flying around, that I turned around and left in disgust. I thought it was absolutely absurd, because the breed is supposed to be a natural breed. Berners are farm dogs that are supposed to show a little bit neater and cleaner than what they are on the farm obviously! Although, in Switzerland, I have heard Berners are shown straight off the farm. They are not supposed to be heavily groomed.

Are whiskers trimmed for the show ring?

People have the option to do so, but I prefer not to. Whiskers are there for a reason, so I like to leave them there.

You keep two dogs now. What is the largest number of dogs you have kept at one time?

The most we have ever had at one time is three. It convinced us that two dogs at one time was our ideal number. Especially with the amount of obedience training I do. I like to spend a lot of time teaching my dogs. When I have more than two, I don't feel like I can give them what I want to give them.

When the bitch is in season and is living with a male, do you have any tips on how to keep them both in focus?

I haven't had to deal with that yet because usually one or the other has been neutered. Both my dogs are still intact. Gita just went through her season, but thank goodness, Kepler was still young enough to be not totally aware. He experimented, but he was not serious! (laughter)

What is your setup like for the dogs?

My dogs are house dogs. I have a very large fenced yard that is two-thirds woods and one-third yard, but they spend most of their time in the house.

Is it safe for two dogs of this breed to share the same exercise area?

Oh, yes.

Does this breed have any specific care requirements?

They need to be with their people! (laughter) Actually, they are low-maintenance dogs. It is surprising, because they have a moderately long coat. My dogs' fur virtually never mats up. I don't have to brush them regularly, but when they are shedding, I do brush them.

What are some of your favorite grooming products or tools you like to use?

I don't use any grooming products, aside from shampoo. I don't even use a dog shampoo, I use Castille soap. I have a pair of thinning shears and scissors to trim their feet and ears when needed. I also use a pinbrush and a coat rake. That is it, I don't need any more.

What advice would you give to a breeder who is just starting out?

I would tell them to learn as much as they can. You need to find yourself a mentor who has been in the breed for a long time, and learn as much as you can from them. You need to ask a lot of questions of people who are in your breed, and even those with different breeds. You can learn a lot from people in other breeds. It is a very good idea to go to national specialties. You can get a broader perspective on dogs if you go to the national and see all the dogs from all across the country, whereas, regionals have a limited draw. There are definite regional patterns in the dogs. You need to read about the breed as much as possible. Talk to people who have been in the breed for a long time, especially when you have respect for what they produced.

Do you feel a person should go to a kennel with big winners to purchase a pup?

Not necessarily. Again, there are a lot of good dogs out there who are not being campaigned to be top winners. Just because the kennel is big, does not mean it will produce better.

Which kennels do you consider to be the best today?

I wouldn't want to pinpoint a specific kennel. There are a number of people who are producing nice dogs. An interesting thing to consider is how many dogs a given breeder is producing and what ratio of those you would consider to be of good quality. A kennel that produces a lot of dogs may or may not produce a large proportion of very good dogs. The same is true with a smaller operation. It is something that might be worth evaluating. It would be hard, because you really don't know how many puppies a stud dog has produced.

What has been your involvement with clubs?

I have been involved with both of our regional and national clubs. We joined both of the clubs shortly after we got our first Berner. About a year later, I was asked to be on the Board of Directors of the regional club, the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Nashoba Valley. I really didn't know what was involved, but I knew there was only one way to find out, so I said I would do it. The next thing I knew, I was president of the club for about a year-and-a-half, during the time we hosted the 1987 National Specialty. I was treasurer for about six years. I was on the board for about ten years total. I resigned from the board about a year-and-a-half ago, because I had agreed to be the chairman for the 1998 National Specialty, which is at the end of April and beginning of May. I wanted to have the time to devote to the specialty. I chaired the committee which developed the Bernese Mountain Dog Draft Tests and have been chairman for draft tests as well as breed/obedience matches. I am currently in my twelfth year of editing our regional club's monthly newsletter.

On the national level, in 1989 I became the Records Chairman, which I continue to do. I also served two terms on the board of directors for the national club.

Would you recommend newcomers to join a local breed club, national breed club, and/or all breed club?

I would definitely recommend joining national and local clubs for the breed. Local clubs are an excellent way to meet people who are involved in the breed. It doesn't matter if they are pet owners or breeders, they will be exposed to a variety of aspects to the breed. Some people want to show in the breed ring, while others may want to show in the obedience ring. It is a way you can find out what you can do with the dogs. Also, it gives you a resource when you have questions. Usually, the clubs have a variety of events you can participate in. It is also a good resource if you are having a problem with your dog, whether it be a training problem or a health problem. If you have a serious problem, it can be overwhelming, but you can get in touch with the club and find you are not the first person in the world who has had to deal with that problem. You can get a lot of moral support and guidance of where to go and what to do. The national club should be a good place to go for educational purposes.

Do you feel the national club has enough educational materials available?

There is never enough, there is always room for more. Some breeds have a world congress of their breeds where people from around the world get together for educational purposes.

Do you find the Internet to be of value?

There are two Bernese lists on the Internet. There is one called Berner L that is open to anybody who wants to be on it. I was on it for a while and it was fun. There is definitely some excellent information passed around on the list. It is a great resource for people that are having problems of any kind. There were so many people on it, there were many messages each day. It was overwhelming. There is also a smaller list called Breeder L, which is for people that want to breed. Because it is smaller, there is less coming through, and it is more focused on its content.

Does the national club have a home page?

Yes, it does, and a number of the regional clubs have them now.

Do you feel there is enough education for judges?

As I said before, there is never enough. We try, as often as possible, to have study groups at our national specialties. The first few times we did it, we were very successful. After a few years, we got almost no response at all. We are having one again this year, but we don't know the response level we will get. Getting people to the national specialties is the best way to educate. When you consider the resources that are gathered there in the form of people and their experiences, it is truly amazing. It is worth taking advantage of.

What do you think of the AKC video about your breed?

It is pretty good. I was there when they filmed it. I was invited to participate, because Jay Jay had earned his 200 that year! (laughter) That was a very special honor to be invited to be there. Unfortunately, it was a rainy day, so it was all taped in the rain. All the close-up shots were under a tent, so at least the dogs weren't soaking wet. I haven't seen any videos on other breeds, so I can't compare.

Are you familiar with the AKC's computer visualization program?

I have seen some of it. It is very clever and a great way to help people learn how to visualize the little details and the little differences between the dogs. They can use the computer to very slowly modify things, like the neck length. It has a lot of potential and I hope it is used more and more.

How long have you lived in your present location?

I have lived in this house for about fourteen years. Prior to that, we lived in New Hampshire for seven years.

Do you mind telling us how old you are?

I am in my early 40's.

How long have you and Tom been married?

We have been married for 21 years.

What have you done for a living?

For the first few years when we lived in New Hampshire, I worked as a veterinary technician. When we moved here it was too long to commute, especially in the winter when the roads weren't great. That was about the time we got our first dog, so we decided I would stay home with the dogs. It has opened up time for me to do the volunteer work for all the dog clubs.

What does your husband do for a living?

Tom is a computer software engineer.

What kind of education did you have?

My education, or the dogs' education? (laughter) I graduated from Harvard in 1976. I majored in biology, focusing on animal behavior.

How have dogs affected your lifestyle?

They have vastly improved my lifestyle. I can't imagine being without dogs. They are a wonderful addition to my life.

Are there any drawbacks of being in dogs?

There can't be very many! There are always the times when the dogs wake us up too early, but every bit of it is worth it. I couldn't say there are any major drawbacks.

Is there anything we haven't covered, or anything you would like to add?

We have covered an awful lot. I can't think of anything right now.

Thank you very much for inviting me and introducing me to your crew here.

Thank you very much. I am honored to be included in something like this. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Gail Vogel

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Gail Vogel
HEARTLIGHT
Battle Ground, Washington

This interview was conducted at the home of Gail Vogel in December 1999 by Nancy Cozby.

How did you first get started in dogs?

I was raised with dogs, and they have always been a major part of my life. I went from showing horses to showing dogs, so that was a nice transition for me, when I had a decrease in the activities of showing horses.

How long have you been in this breed?

I've had Bernese Mountain Dogs since 1979.

What made you pick this breed?

I had Belgian Tervurens before, a wonderful, intelligent breed. I wanted a breed that was kind, intelligent and got along well with other animals; that was good with kids and older people. I researched books and talked with people, and decided this would be an ideal breed for me. I have found that it certainly is.

How did you find your first Bernese Mountain Dog?

I don't remember exactly how that occurred, but I do know the referral came from Barbara Packard from the San Francisco Bay Berners. She had referred me to a lady in New Jersey named Kathy Roth, and I later received my first Berner, which was Gunther Von Vogel.

How did you get in touch with Barbara Packard in the first place?

I don't know how it happened, but she has been very instrumental in helping the breed and in working with people in this breed. Barbara and her husband have dedicated many years to affecting the genetics and welfare of Berners. They originated our health database.

So your first dog actually came from New Jersey?

Yes.

How did you find your first show dog?

That was Gunther. I took him to my second show which was the National in 1980, and he was Best in Sweeps; he went on to become a Group winner, and was Veteran's Dog in 1986 at our National Specialty.

Did you look for your first Bernese with the idea of showing or just with the idea of getting a pet?

The primary goal for me was a pet, but to have a show dog was also in the back of my mind. I wasn't sure that he was going to turn out to be a show dog. I really didn't know very much about show dogs at that time. I didn't pick him knowing the details of the breed standard or anything. I hardly knew what it took to make a champion, but the breeder, Kathy, knew some and felt that he had potential. I met Denise Dean when Gunther was a puppy, and she said, "Oh, definitely don't neuter him. Let's show him." She showed him at the National Specialty in 1980.

What made you decide that you wanted to breed?

I kind of got hooked with Gunther. I was really having a lot of fun showing him. I had met wonderful people in this breed. I thought this was a great hobby, and so I pursued my search for a bitch, but I wasn't quite as lucky. As many know, this breed has a lot of problems orthopedically, and I had some not-so-favorable experiences with some of the bitches I raised that did not have good hips. Eventually, I received a puppy back who was Gunther's daughter; she became my first bitch that I bred. Her name was Ch. Heartlight's Autograph.

Was this your first experience with showing or had you showed other kinds of dogs?

I had a Tervuren that I was going to show, but he did not turn out. I really had not had any experience with showing dogs, but I had shown horses since I was young. Competition and animals have always been in my background.

How many litters have you bred?

I've bred two litters.

Would you say one of those was better than the other?

The first litter produced four

BEST OPPOSITE SEX
1
4

Ch. Gunther Von Vogel CD, "Gunther," age nine months with Denise Dean and Gail Vogel.

champions out of six puppies, and they all had OFA clear hips. Ch. Heartlight's Baby Grand, who I kept, was from that litter. I won the National Specialty in 1990 with him, and he also was a Group winner and a top winning dog. That was a great litter for me, and it produced good temperaments and better health than my second.

In the second litter, one of the bitches turned out quite well and finished. I picked a stud dog for her, and she produced the boy that I have now. He is Ch. Heartlight's Stand By Me, also a Group winner and Best of Winners at our 1997 National Specialty.

So how many champions have been in your litters?

In my two litters, I've had five champions.

Do you have a particular dog that you have owned or bred that you thought was your best?

I've raised three boys who turned out to be good dogs. If I could combine them altogether, I think I could probably have the best, but I did the most winning with Ch. Heartlight's Baby Grand, and I was very attached to him. In some ways he was a very sound, balanced dog for the breed, but in some ways he had some things that I would have liked to improve upon. That's a hard question to answer. I think at the time you have them they are the best, and then you go on to the next one, and they become the best. It's like when people say, "What is your favorite dog?" It is always the one I have at the current time. I have great memories in this breed from the dogs I've owned, but I always feel a special attachment to the one I have in the present.

What was his final standing?

He ended up in the top five, but I don't remember where he was in the standings.

Ch. Gunther Von Vogel.

Did you have one who was a big character, or who was a really funny dog?

They all have their individual characteristics. The part that I liked so much about Baby Grand, or "Bogie," was that he was a great swimmer, and he loved the ocean. I lived in California, and he would go out and ride the waves. He just loved the ocean. Actually, all three of my males have been great swimmers.

Bogie's mother had a very cute personality, and she would pick up all the dog bowls. If I had five or six, she would stack them altogether and pick them up and bring them to me. She loved to carry things. (laughter)

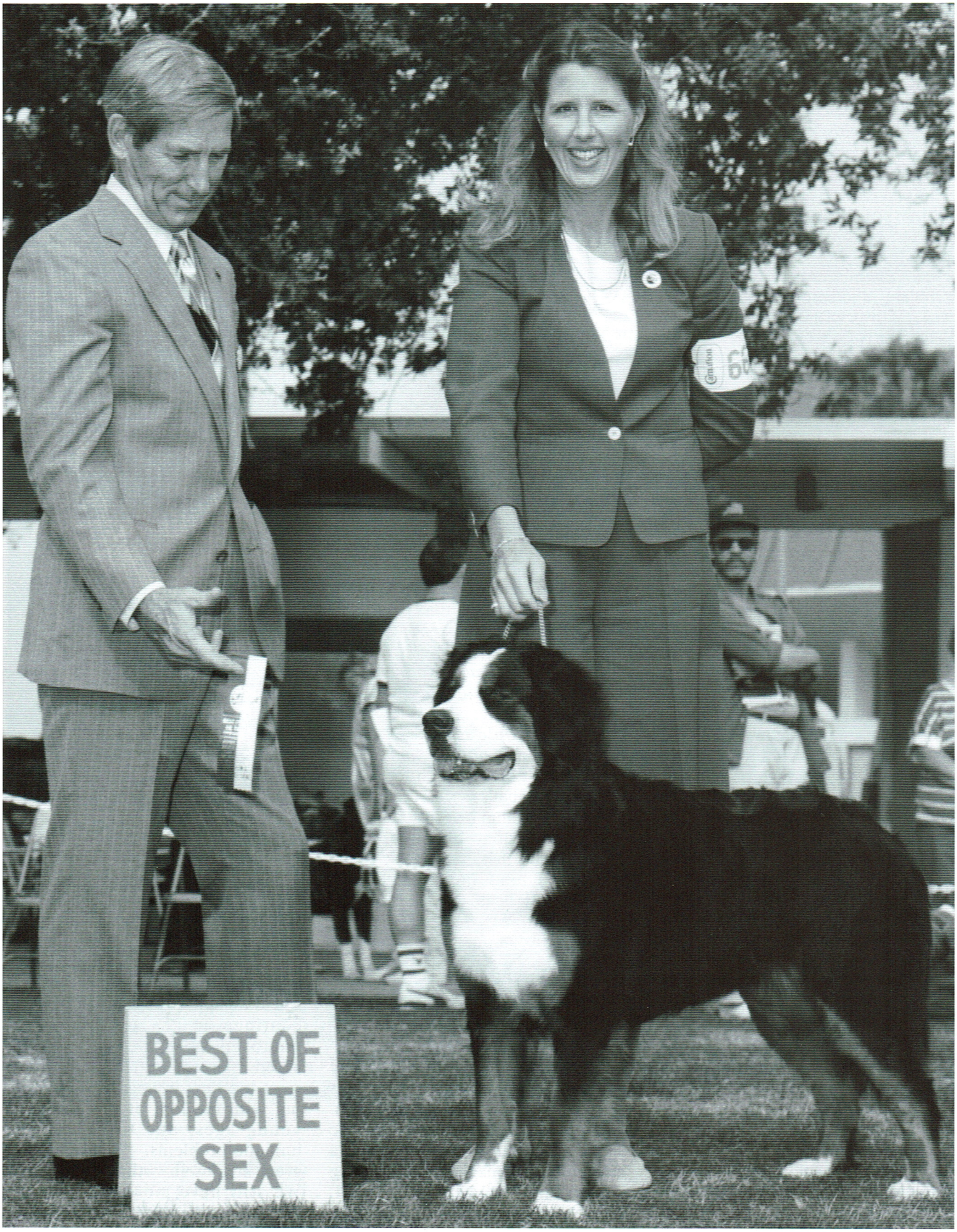
Can pedigrees in this breed be trusted as to accuracy?

Yes, they can.

How have you used inbreeding, linebreeding and outcrossing, and when should each be used?

We use inbreeding to capitalize on the strengths in the genes. I think inbreeding and linebreeding need to be done very selectively. This is a breed with some very significant health problems.

I was recently reading a study that was done with Poodles. It stated that with an inbreeding coefficient of greater than 30 percent, they saw a decrease in lifespan by three years – from age thirteen to age ten.


BEST OF
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Ch. Heartlight's Autograph, "Punky."

decrease in lifespan by three years – from age thirteen to age ten.

The outcross is essential in this breed to try to increase the level of vigor and health in this breed. We have too many problems to do too much inbreeding. My first breeding was actually four times on a dog named Ch. Haledon Davos V. Yolderhof CD. In essence, I was able to get some very sound, nice dogs, but I feel it was also a little close when it comes to the health problems and some of the issues we are dealing with, such as immune problems.

Who or what has influenced your breeding the most?

I've met some great people in this breed along the way, and I continue to learn. Denise Dean got me started, and I learned a lot from her, and I continue to learn. Ann and Mark Mellegan have taught me a lot, and I have a lot of respect for many of the breeders in this breed. It has been a continuous process, and I have met some great people.

How many dogs do you keep now?

Right now, I have two dogs, but I normally have around six. I lost four this year, four older bitches, so it has been a very tragic year for me. I don't know how many I will add back, but eventually, a few more will come back, I am sure.

It must be terribly hard to lose that many in a year.

It was devastating to me. I really had a hard time with losing them and saying good-bye to them.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

I just thought that this breed has from the beginning really warmed my heart, and they are truly the most incredible breed that way. They are special in terms of how they connect with people and how loving they are. Therefore, for me, they have truly been my heartlight.

Do you name your litters by any sort of scheme or theme?

No, I don't. I haven't had enough litters to do that. With two litters, it was easy enough to figure that out. (laughter)

So you just kind of go by whatever comes to mind?

Ch. Heartlight's Baby Grand, "Bogie."

I think I gave all of them names starting with "B" in that first litter, but the owners picked pretty much what they wanted.

Are you working toward a distinguishable line, or do you think that you have a distinguishable line? Do you think people look for certain things when they think of your dogs?

I haven't bred enough for people to say, "Oh, that's a Heartlight dog." There is no stamp on these dogs, but what I have done in this breed is demonstrated that even with a small amount of breeding you can still breed quality dogs. I have been fortunate, obviously, to come up with some quality animals in the limited breeding I have done, but that's probably not my reputation for any kind of a stamp on this breed. There are just not enough to create that.

How would you rate type, temperament and soundness in order of importance?

That's really a tough question. Without a good temperament, the dog is not useful to most people as a pet, so I can't imagine ever forgoing temperament in a breeding plan. Therefore, temperament is very important to me.

Type is important. If it doesn't look like a Bernese Mountain Dog, then it doesn't make any difference how sound it is.

However, a Bernese Mountain Dog is a working dog. It needs to be able to work, to be active, to function for the purpose for which it was bred. That's soundness.

They are all important. It's a balancing act, except I do not feel you can make compromises when it comes to temperament.

What would be your long-range goal in breeding dogs?

I don't have grand goals for breeding Bernese Mountain Dogs at this point. I certainly plan to continue in the breed, and to continue to promote what I think is important in terms of a substantial dog with a sound mind and a sound body. I will continue to try to support an improvement of the health in this breed. This is a grave concern to most breeders because we are dealing with the loss of these dogs at young ages, due to cancer and immune problems. We have made great strides in orthopedic issues. We still have more work on the elbows, but the strides we have made both in temperament and orthopedics have been great over the last twenty

BEST OF
BREED
OR VARIETY
RUBIN PHOTO

"Bogie."

years. We are now faced with some significant health problems. If I could in any way make a difference, it would certainly be something I would like to do.

Describe your interpretation of the perfect dog of this breed.

This to me is a farm dog and a draft dog, so he needs to exemplify power, strength, substance and depth, as well as good bone and breadth. A Bernese Mountain Dog is a beautiful dog to look at. He needs to have stature, stance and strength, along with the kind, soft expression which

Ch. Heartlight's Stand By Me, "Stanley."

we all love to look at.

Why do some look good standing and posing, but not so good when moving?

You can't always see some structural things when they are standing, although if you put your hands on them, you could feel them. However, you can't always see the structural faults. Sometimes it is a little bit deceiving when they are standing still. When I see and feel them on the table as puppies, I think sometimes what you see standing is what you see in the ring, as far as the length of neck, the layback, how the shoulders are hung on, and the angulation. Sometimes, a lot of what you see when the dog is standing is what you see when the dog is moving.

How should they move in the front when they are coming at you, and from the side?

They should converge at a faster speed. They should be clean in their follow-through, with no wasted motion. The front end should not come off the ground to any extreme extent. This is a draft breed; it should be strong and effortless in its movement, and it should be clean coming at you. The side movement should typify power. Although a longer-legged dog will have a bigger stride, this is not usual.

How about from the rear?

At a slower speed, the rear is going to be wider. It still needs to demonstrate and show a push, with power and strength behind. When you get very close rears, or rears that converge at a slow speed, you don't always get the power and strength that you need in a draft animal. They should converge at a faster speed, and fairly straight.

What are you looking for in the head?

This is a square-appearing head, but not harsh. There is well-defined stop, but it is not exaggerated. It is a wedge shape when you look down upon the head. I look for great fill in the cheeks, a full muzzle, a softness in expression, a good dark eye, a nice eye shape, medium sized ears closely fitted, and a good underjaw. The ratio of muzzle to backskull should be one to one and one-half.

Should they have a parallel plane head?

Yes, and sometimes we will see some down-face in this breed, which detracts from their appearance. The skull is slightly rounded, but should not appear domed.

How serious are missing teeth?

The standard calls for full dentition. Missing teeth are a problem in the breed, so it is something we have to consider. Many judges now are checking for dentition, but they haven't always. Considering the amount of problems we have in the breed, that is probably not the highest priority. However, it is something to consider when breeding.

How important is eye color?

Eye color makes the expression, so it is very important. A light eye detracts from the soft expression of this breed.

If you could rate the whole dog on a point scale of 100, how many points would you assign to the head?

Twenty points.

How about pigment?

We don't have a big problem with pigment in the breed, although the dogs who have really good dark pigment are very distinctive and attractive.

Would you breed to one who had any missing pigment?

That wouldn't deter me.

Do you ever have winter nose here?

I don't get winter nose. I haven't had that.

What should the relationship of chest depth be to the rest of the dog? Should it come to or below the elbow?

The standard calls for it to come to the elbows. When the chest gets too low, then you have some difficulty in movement. It should come to the elbow, and this is a breed that calls for good depth of chest.

Do you generally see that with them?

"Stanley."

There are plenty of dogs with this characteristic.

Has it been your experience that coat is very important to winning in the ring?

Yes, coat makes a big difference. You can do a lot with coat in terms of creating appearance.

What is an ideal front? A 45-degree layback of shoulder with a corresponding layback of upper arm, or a moderate front?

That 45-degree angle is a little bit controversial, but I think they should have good angle in front. I don't believe we have that good angle in front. What we have sometimes in the breed is a lot more angulated rears than fronts, so we get these dogs who are kind of running over the top of themselves. There is so much power coming from the rear, and the front is not able to keep up. Consequently, what this breed needs is a good layback of shoulder, and that is important in a breeding program. Good layback decreases stress on the front, and creates more efficient, effortless movement.

How about the croup?

"Stanley."

The croups are generally pretty good in this breed, although we have some flat croups. What happens when the croup gets too flat is that you just don't get the amount of muscling that you need in the rear to

"Stanley."

"Stanley."

support the rear joints. The muscling doesn't come through as good, so a slight slope to croup really makes a difference.

How about the correct topline? Is this functional or for beauty?

Topline is kind of a funny thing. It is affected by exercise, weight and age. I believe a good strong topline is functional and a flat topline is functional. Sometimes we have somewhat short upper arms which create a downhill effect, and it puts too much strain and weight on the front end.

What is the ideal height of a dog and a bitch?

I like a dog around 26 inches and a bitch somewhere around 24 to 25.

How about the tail length and the set?

The end of the bone in the tail should either reach the hock or come below the hock. That's in the standard. It should not be a high tailset. It should not be carried over the back. It really does change the overall appearance when the tail is set high.

How about the ideal ear and earset?

The ideal ears come straight off the side of the head nicely, without being too high or standing away from the head, or too long and houndy. We see some of that in the breed, too.

How about the feet?

I like a nice compact, well-arched foot. We have some nice feet in this breed, and that's what we look for.

Do you think that a dog with bad feet should be used?

You have to take everything into consideration with the rest of the dog. It wouldn't be my priority, considering we are a breed with so many problems.

How about the ideal temperament for you?

The standard allows for a dog who is aloof, so this doesn't necessarily have to be a dog who is jumping all over strangers. However, he needs to be confident and intelligent. Confidence, intelligence and kindness are a part of what this breed is. Shyness still prevails in the breed, and is accentuated in homes where the dogs aren't socialized well, or live in kennels.

How about the most serious faults or the most common ones?

"Stanley."

The most serious problem we have in this breed is cancer. In terms of structural problems in this breed, the most serious ones are front ends and lack of layback, along with good angulation in the front. This creates far more structural problems in elbows and shoulders.

You mentioned that you have been helping to rewrite the standard.

This project came up a year or so ago, to try to make the standard more definite. We started going on this, but it has kind of been set by the wayside. The purpose was to see if we could become more specific in our description of the breed. Some of the terms we use in the standard are somewhat vague. For example: What is sturdy bone? Does a Dalmatian have sturdy bone? Or, is it St. Bernard bone? The purpose originally was to give some leeway, because the breed has had great variation. The effort now is to become more specific in our description, to help educate judges and new breeders.

Should there be any disqualifications?

Yes. The disqualifications are no ground color other than black, and blue eyes are a disqualification in this breed. Those are our two disqualifications. In addition, judges should be encouraged to excuse dogs from the ring who do not have sound temperament, or withhold ribbons from dogs who do not have adequate type and structure.

Should champions be specialed?

Not all champions are Specials material. Also, the quality in a Special may not necessarily be a quality in one who you want as a breeding individual. A top winning dog is usually one with great presence and movement.

Does making the top ten or twenty mean anything?

It means something; there is a level of quality in being in the top ten or twenty. It doesn't necessarily mean that the dog is a great Bernese Mountain Dog, but in some ways the dog is a great dog.

Does popularization help or harm the breed?

This has become quite a popular breed. In some ways, it has helped us in terms of improvement in quality of this breed; yet, in some ways, it harms us. Money can affect focus, and focus can be drawn away from the welfare of the dogs towards what serves peoples' egos and interests, rather than what might serve individual dog's needs or the breed's best interests.

Is judging fair for the most part?

Yes, most judges try to put up the best dog that is presented to them. When people make complaints, they need to realize that the judges can only judge what's in front of them. If we don't present good quality and good examples of the breed to them, they are limited. Some judges have seen how many difficulties this breed has had over the years. Some may not pay attention enough to some of the important

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"Stanley."

aspects that make the Bernese Mountain Dogs the real "typey" dogs, and sometimes look for just the sounder dog. However, that is happening less and less these days. More judges are paying attention to what makes a dog a Bernese Mountain Dog.

Of course, there are always politics and attraction to showy, big-moving dogs when you get to the Group level. Nevertheless, at the Breed level, there is a lot of good judging going on.

Would you rather show under an all breed judge or a breeder-judge?

A breeder-judge, without question. They are our peers. I am fortunate enough to be part of the committee who is putting on the 2001 Specialty, and this year we were able to present to our members a panel of five breeder-judges to pick from to judge our breed. Any one of them will be a great judge for all of us. It is an honor to be able to show under a breeder-judge and get their opinion.

Ch. Heartlight's Ursula.

Do you think poor judging is more a result of politics, or the fact that a lot of judges don't know the breed?

It can be politics. Also, there are some judges who are not great judges, and I don't know if they would necessarily do any better in any other breed. The judges who do well in one breed tend to do well in other breeds, because they put forth the effort, and they have studied the standards, talked to people, and learned about the breed. You can see them in the ring; they are working very hard to put up the best dog, and it is not an easy call. I've been in the middle of the ring, and you have a very short period of time to make a decision, and it isn't always an easy call. Sometimes it can go either way. I don't believe politics are as important as the fact that great handlers make good dogs look exceptional.

Does advertising influences judges?

Sure it does. With a good handler and a lot of advertising, you can probably do more winning than you would have without them. Over the years, I have watched great dogs who did a tremendous amount of winning without much advertising.

Ch. Shersan Change O' Pace V. Halidon was our top winning dog in this breed, shown by the owner's daughter. At that time, she certainly didn't have any pull politically, but that dog went on to win eighteen Bests in Show. We've had other great winning dogs in this breed. The great dogs will rise to the top no matter what.

Is it ethical to retouch advertising photographs?

No. I never really thought about that, because I don't really think people are doing that. I guess it is probably not ethical to do that, and I don't feel it is ethical to make the changes that people make in dogs. Whatever you have tried to change the illusion of, the judges are going to see what the dog is when they put their hands on the dog. I have even heard of tails being surgically corrected in this breed!

Do you show your own dogs?

I have shown my own dogs. I did have a handler early on with my first dog, but I've shown the rest myself.

Have you ever handled for someone else?

Oh, maybe as a favor, but I'm not exactly in demand as a handler. (laughter)

I don't think anyone is going to pay me to handle their dogs.

How do you train puppies, and at what age do you begin?

I begin right away. I begin by doing lots of things with puppies, such as taking them places and teaching them whatever I can. I teach them to come when they are little puppies, up and down the hallway. I believe in puppy kindergarten, with a lot of socialization and stimulation at a young age. That is essential to the development of the dog.

Do you attend fun matches and training classes?

I have gone to fun matches and training classes. I don't try to push a dog too young in the conformation ring. There is plenty of time for that. "Stanley" was my last boy out, and he was almost two before I started showing him much.

How about obedience training?

I've put two CD's on dogs and trained in basic obedience. I am working Stanley in basic obedience right now. I have a lot of respect for people who are active in the performance events. The evolution of dog training has taken some great turns, in terms of positive reinforcement and new methods that are much better. The Berners have a great capacity to learn.

Have you done any other activities, such as tracking, or agility?

I have done agility, and I am working a German Shorthaired Pointer in agility right now. I have had my Berner in the agility class recently. He is a big boy, and he scares me a little bit because he is always looking at me when he goes over the obstacles. When he hit the top of the A-frame and was staring at me, I thought, "I don't know if I want to do this." They are a big breed for that, but we have had some success in agility with Bernese Mountain Dogs.

I have not done any tracking, but I tried Schutzhund. We had fun at it; it was kind of a play thing. They aren't really well-suited for that sport. However, we have had some German dogs that have been successful in Schutzhund.

Any other field work, such as sledding, weight pulling, and so forth?

I've done some drafting. I have not done it at a competitive level, but I hope to do that. All of mine have been hooked up to a cart.

How intelligent is this breed compared to other breeds?

They are a very bright breed. They are very sensitive to humans, and they try pretty hard. Probably not everybody would agree with that, but they are very intelligent.

Is it appropriate to take a dog anywhere off-leash?

Oh, they love to run in the woods. You have to be careful where you do that, but this is a breed that loves to run, and they have a pretty strong prey drive. Mine thoroughly enjoy running in the woods and chasing squirrels and rabbits, and running is great for the dog. You have to look at your level of training and level of distractibility when you take a dog off-leash. You must be absolutely sure that your dog is safe.

I remember at my first National in 1980, we were set up in a hotel in Santa Rosa where all the rooms surrounded a big grass area. I thought these Berners are all so wonderful. There must have been twenty Bernese Mountain Dogs all loose in this grass area, and all getting along wonderfully. That was my real introduction to the breed as a large group, and I thought what a wonderful breed that can be like that together.

How important is training to winning in conformation?

It is important to winning in conformation. When you have a dog that presents itself well, is animated, shows well and has the attitude, that makes a big difference in the ring. You can't hide the faults totally, but you can certainly accentuate a dog's ability, and many of our big winning dogs have been "showy" dogs. It is pretty hard to go the distance without the attitude, and some of the attitude is a training process.

Can shy or aggressive dogs be corrected with training?

Yes, you can certainly correct aggressive dogs and keep them under control. Shy dogs, with lots of exposure, can certainly perform adequately in the ring, but one has to be very serious about training them to be performers. Dogs that are aggressive toward humans, or are fearful, should not be bred, in my opinion.

Do big-name handlers help dogs win?

Not necessarily. It can help, but sometimes the not-so-big-name handler is the one who is going to take the time with the dog and get the attitude developed and the rapport. The Bernese Mountain Dog does not show for everybody. They like to be connected to who is on the end of the lead; therefore, somebody who is willing to take the time and really work with the dog is going to do a lot better than maybe a big-name handler who expects the dog to act like a Golden or another breed. We have had big-name handlers and owner/handlers who have done very well with Bernese Mountain Dogs.

You didn't start out handling your own dog, but you learned to do that.

I've learned to do that. I had a handler in southern California who did his best to teach me how to handle a dog.

Do you have any specific advice you can give to other owners?

It's great if you can show your own dog. It's great for the dog, and the dog likes to be with you. Obviously, you have to be able to run around the ring, but it is a wonderful thing to learn to do with your dog. I really encourage it at the Breed level. It is wonderful for the people who have taken the time and the effort to learn how to handle a dog. They get a lot out of it and accomplish a lot. Sometimes it is hard on the dog if you are nervous, and the dog worries, too. So practice in matches and visualize what you are doing and work with people. There are a lot of really helpful people in this breed. I think it is great when people want to handle their own dogs.

Should they take classes?

You can take classes, or you can find another handler who is willing to be your mentor and help you learn how to do it. Also, other handlers teach classes. There are lots of ways to learn. There are videos, and George Alston does great seminars. There are lots of ways to learn to handle; in addition to watching at ringside.

You said you have done some carting. Can you talk about that a little bit?

My first dog was very good with a cart. I didn't do carting formally. Now we have a draft test, and we didn't have that when I started in the breed; consequently, I just carted the neighborhood children. He used to take all the children in the neighborhood for rides in the cart. I haven't done as much carting recently, but it is part of what the breed is – a draft animal. It proves their heritage. It is not a heritage that didn't come out of a rather shady past. Carting in Europe was banned at some point in England, because of the abuse. It was kind of steeped in a history of abuse. At the level that we do carting, I think the dogs and the owners are really enjoying the process. They now offer this breed a Versatility Award, which is an award given to a dog with a conformation title, a drafting title and one other performance event title, which has greatly promoted all aspects of the breed.

Do you feel that they should do or should be able to do what they were bred for?

Yes. You can probably train any Bernese Mountain Dog to cart. This is not a difficult thing. It isn't difficult to train any Bernese Mountain Dog to do basic obedience, such as a CD. Any activities that people can encourage their dogs to be a part of helps stimulate them both physically and mentally. The Bernese is happiest when they have physical and mental activity.

You have trained your dogs over the years, but what have they taught you?

They have taught me kindness, acceptance and understanding. They have taught me how to live in the present. I have learned that more than anything from the recent loss of my dogs. A dog doesn't really care how long it lives; it lives in the present; it knows how to enjoy life every moment. I am learning, finally, from my dogs to just take hold of what I have today. This breed has given me so much, in terms of their love and support and kindness. They have been my best friends over the years.

When you have done breedings, have they been natural or controlled?

I have had several stud dogs, so I have done AI's with them; but mostly, we have done natural breedings. The first dog I had was very confused. He was confused about the whole breeding process, so he needed a little help. He was never bred extensively. The next dog I had was pretty good; I think I had figured it out better. The dog I have now has had all natural breedings.

It can go either way with this breed. This is not a breed that is totally vigorous when it comes to breeding. The males aren't always totally vigorous, and neither are the bitches in their whelping.

How do you help a mating along if you have to?

You mean you want those details? (laughter) I get down there and I hold the girl, and I kind of aim her. I use this little stool, and I sit on that and sort of drape the girl over me, so I can kind of hold her, and then I let the male do it on his own. I don't like to be too forceful with the process. We have to have some respect for natural selection, and some respect for each of the animals and where they are at. Therefore, I try not to do a lot of forced breedings.

Should the stud fee be the same for proven and unproven dogs regardless of titles?

Certainly when you are starting out a male, and he hasn't been bred much, a lower stud fee seems reasonable. The price of a puppy is probably reasonable, too. It isn't a significant concern in the breeding of Bernese Mountain Dogs, what the stud fee is. There are lots of different policies that people use in the breeding practices.

Have you ever refused to service a bitch?

Yes, there have been some bitches that I have felt were not worthy of being bred. A mating is a joint commitment between both owners. I feel responsible for the welfare of the puppies. It is important to understand and appreciate the commitment and focus of the bitch's owner.

There are people breeding Bernese Mountain Dogs who have great feeling and compassion for their dogs and care deeply about what happens to the breed, and follow up with their puppies, providing assistance to the buyers.

There are also some breeders who do not have the sense of compassion needed to be engaging in this event. Although they may breed great show dogs, the price the offspring pay in terms of the kennel life and lack of attention and stimulation is just not warranted, nor is it fair.

Would you breed to a dog with a very serious fault, if it was outstanding in other areas?

It depends on what the serious fault is, and how it affects the function of the dog, such as bites and tailsets. Certainly, if it is in temperament or type, it would be hard for me. There are enough dogs out there today that one does not need to breed to a dog with a serious fault.

Can you talk a little more about the markings, for the people who are not familiar with this breed?

Markings are the hallmark of this breed. We have the white chest typically in an inverted cross – a Swiss cross. It isn't always evident on a big male with a lot of hair. The white feet certainly exemplify the breed, although we have had some great dogs who didn't have white on all their feet. The facial mask is important; it is an important part of the expression of the breed. I don't think the tip of the tail really counts for much of anything. Dogs who have full white legs and full white collars are not correct. Markings are part of their Swiss heritage. They did not breed dogs who were heavily marked, and we tend not to show them. We've had some great dogs that have had white running up the legs, and it hasn't been a significant problem; however, when the markings deviate significantly, it detracts from the overall striking appearance of the breed.

Is it a good idea to breed to the top winning dog, regardless of the pedigrees?

It is never a good idea to breed to a dog and disregard the pedigrees. The pedigree is what you are getting when you breed.

How many litters should a bitch have? What is the youngest and the oldest a bitch should be bred?

To me, a bitch should have no more than three litters. Also, if you can't get anything good out of the first two litters, why would you try again? Three litters are plenty.

When you breed a bitch, obviously, you need certifications for hips and elbows, and we can now do that at a younger age; however, you have to look at the emotional maturity of the bitch. It is important that you respect where that bitch is, mentally, when you breed her. If you are breeding at an older age, you have to look at whether that bitch is really healthy and vigorous or whether having a litter is going to tax her more than it should.

Do you help your bitches whelp?

Ch. Heartlight's Blockbuster.

Both of them had a c-section, and I assisted.

Have you ever had to supplement feed very young puppies?

I did with the last litter I had, which was a few years ago. The bitch really had a lot of problems, so I bottle-fed the babies and supplemented them.

What did you use?

I used goat's milk and yogurt and vitamins. My dogs now eat basically raw food and bones.

Do you wean the puppies yourself or do you let the bitch do it?

My experience has been that the bitch weans the puppies.

Do you cull?

No.

Do you have an opinion on what show puppies should sell for right *show puppies should sell for right now?*

I feel they are all overpriced. A show puppy should sell for no more than $1,000, and a pet quality puppy should sell for no more than $800.

Do you sell pet pups with spay/neuter agreements?

Yes, or limited registration, which is now common.

At what age do you place your puppies in their new homes?

Seven-and-one-half to eight weeks is a good time.

Can you talk a little more about their diet?

Their diet is based on bones and raw food. They regularly get large meaty bones to chew on and eat. They eat chicken and raw turkey necks, vegetables, dairy products and supplements.

I give them a multi-vitamin supplement, vitamin E, selenium, vitamin C, kelp, acidophilus, flax oil, and herbs as needed.

Can you tell us why you use some of these things?

I use them to optimize health. Obviously, the E and C are anti-oxidants and certainly help the immune system. Vitamin C has been proven to be very helpful for joints and growth. Vitamin E is certainly good for the coats and the skin and is an immune supporter; selenium, the same. Kelp adds iodine and can boost the thyroid and is an additional source of minerals. The bones provide a lot of minerals. Flax oil is very good for the skin and is also good for the immune system. I use acidophilus to keep the intestinal system healthy.

Do you condition your dogs?

We walk every day for about 30 to 40 minutes, some off-lead, some on-lead, and my male Berner swims every day in the river. I have now also taken up bicycling, so I bicycle along with some of them, too. I keep them active physically, and it helps me, too.

It's nice to have the company.

Right. I'm the one who needs it, so I drag them along. (laughter)

When showing them, how much grooming should be done?

You condition the coat regularly at home, and it probably takes an hour to put them together before they go in the ring – maybe a half hour. There is some trimming; not a lot, however. We discourage extensive trimming in the breed, but it has become more popular over the years.

Do you have any particular grooming tools or products that you use?

No, nothing special; no "hot, secret tips." However, have a good strong blow dryer. I use one of those cattle dryers, Circuiteer, to get the water off them.

Do you scissor them anywhere or trim their whiskers?

I have trimmed whiskers. I have a show coming up this weekend, but I am not going to trim whiskers. I trim around the feet and around the hocks, just to clean them up. Also, definitely the ear hair. That's about all I trim. I have trimmed more in the past, but that's all I am trimming now.

How do you kennel your dogs? What is your setup like?

One sleeps on the floor and one sleeps on the bed. I've always had dogs loose in the house. They have always had complete run of the house and the yard with the doggy-door or a door open. I have never had a kennel setup. I have had a kennel run for bitches when they came in, but now I am just delegating a room in the house. Having the small numbers that I do, I have never had a need for a kennel. I enjoy the interaction with the dogs. I don't like having dogs in kennels. Why have a dog if you are going to keep it locked up all the time? What is the purpose of having the dog? For some people it is a business, and it is hard to keep multiple numbers together. I'm probably not going to be very popular with that statement, but I just can't understand why one needs to keep large numbers of dogs. I know some great breeders in this breed who have done wonderful things with small numbers.

So you keep adult males and females together?

I had two males, one male I had raised and I had an older male that I had gotten at the time, but they did not get along. Since I had raised one of them, I placed the other male. I would not keep two Bernese males in the house together; it is just not good. I have two males now, but one is a German Shorthaired Pointer, and he is neutered. Some people do good with two male Berners, but it just wouldn't be something that I would do again.

Do you have any advice to give a breeder who is just starting out?

Study! Sit at ringside, and watch all of the dogs. Don't just watch the Bernese. Watch all the breeds, and learn as much as you can about structure, movement and health from breeders in other breeds, and from handlers. Ask a million questions, but look and study. Go to the specialties and sit there with a catalog, and write comments on each dog. There is so much you can learn from watching and studying this breed. Don't make your decisions about your breeding and don't hurry the breeding of litters until you understand what it is you are seeing, as well as what it is that you are wanting and what it is that the breed needs.

Should they necessarily go to a kennel that produces big winners to purchase their first pup?

After you sit and look, you find what dogs you like, and then talk to as many breeders as you can. Some breeders may have more time to help mentor than others. I don't think you have to go to a big-winning kennel. You need to be somewhere where you can get support, assistance and help; therefore, you need to work with somebody who can do that for you. I feel fortunate that Denise and Kathy Roth helped me early on, and I continue to find mentors. You find people that have some sense of camaraderie with you and that you can work with. However, before you do that, learn what you like in the breed. Learn the pedigrees that you like, so that when you go to a breeder you are not just asking them to give you a show dog. You are asking for some specifics, some things that are important to you and to the breed.

Do you recommend joining a local breed club?

Yes, you should join a local breed club. You should join the national club for sure, and the local national club for sure, and the local club. You should get very involved. The people in this breed who get really involved at the local and national level get the most "bennies." The benefits include the camaraderie with each other. We have great friendships going on in this breed, and it's because most people are working hard for this breed. Getting involved in an all breed club is an excellent experience and way to learn. There are some very good old-time breeders in many areas who can teach you a lot. there are breeders in other breeds, and sometimes that teaching is much easier because you don't have the sense of competitiveness that you have among the breeders of your breed.

Is the parent club doing enough to educate judges and new members?

The parent club is trying very hard. There is really an earnest effort on the part of the parent club. There is always room for improvement in education; but as a whole, the national club is very well handled.

How about the AKC video?

They need to change the methodology used to produce this video. They need to collect representatives throughout the country and add these to the tape, instead of filming the video in New York and asking people to fly their dogs in. They need to make it a collage of everything, rather than, "Here are these dogs, and this is an example of correct movement coming and going." It is really limited. We need to probably create more still pictures, so we can add to this video every year pictures of some of the great dogs in this breed and use them as representatives. I don't think the AKC video is adequate in sharing the essence of this breed.

Is there adequate literature, books and magazines, available?

We have some good books and magazines available. There is also a great book available in German, if you read German.

How long have you lived here?

I've lived in Washington for six years. I lived in southern California before that.

Why did you move to Washington?

Ch. Shersan Heartlight Chips Ahoy.

Because I wanted more space for the dogs. I wanted land and some acreage, and I wanted a change from the hustle and bustle of southern California, but I miss it.

How old are you?

I'm 49.

Are you or have you ever been married?

I have, but I'm not now.

What have you done for a living?

I've worked as a vocation rehabilitation counselor in Worker's Compensation for nineteen years. That's enough to scare anyone! I was a mental health counselor before that, in private practice.

How about your educational background?

I have a master's degree in counseling and guidance.

How have the dogs affected your lifestyle?

They affect your lifestyle greatly when you have big numbers. It limits your ability to get away, and in your lifestyle, you live like your dogs. I now have painted cement floors. My house is created for the dogs, and my yard is created for the dogs. My clothes all come with pockets, because I show dogs. My friends all have dogs. If not, they hate the dog hair! It significantly affects your lifestyle when you get involved with dogs extensively.

On the plus side, I've had such a wonderful experience with these dogs, and the neatest people I have met have been in Bernese Mountain Dogs. I have some wonderful friends in this breed, and I am forever grateful for that.

So taking the benefits and the drawbacks together, has it all been worth it?

It has certainly been worth it.

Is there anything we haven't covered or any soapboxes?

I would say the most important thing to think about when anyone chooses to keep a dog, is always try to maintain a focus on enriching the dog's quality of life. Owners should have values which enhance their capacity for wanting to better understand what they can do to keep their dog well-adjusted, happy and healthy. Breeders must have those same capabilities, as well as a strong ethical commitment to insist upon and nurture those values in anyone with whom they place a dog. More now than ever, as the popularity of the breed has dramatically increased the number of owners and breeders, it is important to take the time to slow down and relish the time we have with our dogs as working companions. That should be our primary focus, because it is a great gift to our dogs and ourselves.

Thank you very much.

I enjoyed it. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

Gwen and Art Russell

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Gwen and Art Russell
CAMELOT
Fruitland Park, Florida

This interview was conducted at the home of Gwen and Art Russell in February 2000 by Nancy Cozby.

How did you first get started in dogs?

Gwen: We bought a Shih Tzu way back prior to the time they were accepted by the AKC. At the time, we worked for the government, and there was a gentleman that worked with me who was a professional dog handler on the weekends. We started going to a few of the shows at his encouragement, and we saw the Bernese Mountain Dog. We thought that since we had a Shih Tzu, which no one knew how to spell or pronounce, maybe we should get another breed that nobody knew anything about. We looked in some show catalogues and called a couple of sisters, the Crawfords, who had a kennel in Delaware. We went over and saw their dogs. They placed one of their dogs with us that they thought needed a lot of outside exposure. The dog did not work out well in our particular lifestyle, but it was a start. From there, we found some people in Long Island; we drove up and bought our first dog that was show-quality from them. That was about 27 or 28 years ago. Like most people, we got in this breed by accident.

What, in particular, made you decide that you wanted this breed?

Gwen: We were looking for a breed that matched our personalities. Shih Tzus were a very laid-back breed and not very yappy like a lot of small, Toy breeds. We wanted a larger dog that would be similar. We thought seriously about Golden Retrievers, but we figured that we are not really the athletic, "let's-go-hunting-and-running-in-the-woods" type. We wanted a dog that was a little more sedate and perfectly content to live the same lifestyle that we were living. The Bernese Mountain Dog really fit that picture very well. We had been around a lot of dogs that would totally encompass your life. They just dominated your life. You could have three or four Bernese Mountain Dogs, and you weren't falling all over them, and they weren't demanding constant attention. They are very quiet dogs; that was something that we wanted. Something with personality but that didn't demand your full time.

Art: Plus, they could be around the kids and wouldn't be aggressive or anything like that.

Gwen: Our youngest was about thirteen and, of course, way too old for a baby-sitter. The few times we would go out in the evening we felt that we should have a dog there that would give us both some reassurance. A Berner will be protective without being aggressive.

The first Bernese you actually got was a show dog then?

Gwen: Yes.

What made you decide that you wanted a show dog?

Gwen: The encouragement of the man that I worked with, who was

BEST
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Ch. Carrie On Von Attlee.

a professional handler. We became very good friends, and he said, even with the Shih Tzu, "Gwen, you bathe them, groom them, and bring them to ringside; I'll show them for you." So, we worked it that way. Then we gradually started showing them on our own, starting with fun matches and things like that. We showed our own dogs until it got into the competition level. We were smart enough to realize, or at least I was because I don't think he ever noticed (laughter), that once the competition got a little heavy, I would get very nervous and tend to agitate. Of course, that would translate to the dog. That is when our friend, handler Earl Overstreet, said, "Gwen, you're messing up that dog."

What made you decide that you wanted to breed dogs?

Gwen: The first Berner that we got that was show quality was a very large bitch. Her markings were less instead of more, with a very narrow blaze. At that time, particularly on the East Coast, you saw all different sizes and sorts of Bernese Mountain Dogs, and we noticed that there was not a lot of conformity there at all. Every once in awhile, I would see a dog or a bitch that I really liked, and I would look at mine and think, "Not quite." So, we decided to breed her and tried to find a male that would complement her shortcomings, or in her case, her tallcomings. (laughter) We bred her, and we kept a puppy from the litter.

Then we began to realize when we went to dog shows and studied the standard, that there were still a lot of gaps in what was out there and what was actually the standard. Also, 27 years ago, there were no Bernese breeders that had graduated into the judging business. Most of our judges were St. Bernard or Newfoundland breeders. As a result, they looked for their breed in our breed. I think judges still tend to do that sometimes.

We started concentrating on what that standard really said, and how close we could come to that standard. I will have to say that I don't think we ever produced what is, in my mind, that picture. I have seen a few dogs who actually are that standard and are that picture. But we were striving for perfection. We never bred excessively; only twice did we have two litters at one time. Rarely did we have more than one or two litters a year. That would give us an opportunity to watch the development of the puppies that we had bred. Was it coming closer to what we wanted to do, and did we want to do that again? We did one repeat breeding. I will never be sold on doing repeat breedings again because of our experience. The first breeding was beautiful. She had nine puppies, and they were all consistent. We repeated the breeding again a year later and we had tall ones and short ones and ones with long tails. I didn't see where the repeat breeding really worked. So, we have tried to be conservative in our breeding as well as in the personality of our dogs.

How many litters do you think you have bred overall?

Gwen: Probably fifteen in 27 years.

Do you have one litter that you would say is your best?

Gwen: The litter with Dolly.

Art: Yes, that was Hello Dolly.

Gwen: I guess our top producer was Camelot's Hello Dolly. She also tied for top producer of the year in 1968. She tied with Bev Burney's bitch that year. We had gotten a Swiss import that was an excellent specimen. He wasn't a large-boned dog at all, so in the ring, he tended to look a little smaller than the other dogs. But his movement was great. He was very well put together. He produced some beautiful bitches; he was a great breeder. Unfortunately, we never had a lot of outstanding males from the breedings. We had three or four that looked like beautiful animals, but one had only one testicle, and another one had no live sperm. So for one reason or another they turned out not to be the breeding/show quality that we were looking for. But we have produced some beautiful females.

How many champions do you think have been in the litters that you have bred?

Gwen: Probably close to ten or more. Dolly, in that one litter, had three champions. Some that we sold went into show homes and finished their championships.

Do you have one dog that you would say was the best dog you ever owned or bred?

Gwen: The one that we would think the most of was Jock, the Swiss import. He gave us the most mental challenges as well as anything else. He was an extremely intelligent dog. Also, there was our first Berner, the one from Long Island named Carrie. We have pictures here of our granddaughter sitting on her. Just a general, all-around, "I'm-your-rug-dog" type. An extremely sweet, very big dog. Absolute top of the standard but, at the same time, she had so much personality that went with her. Then, there was Dolly. She had the show quality that blossomed. She could be a bag of bones outside of the ring but when she went into the show ring she just lifted it right up. There was probably not one particular dog, but at least three for different reasons.

Which was the biggest winner?

Gwen: Jock, our Swiss import. I remember one time that we were showing in New Jersey and there were twelve to fifteen entries. We had to travel quite a distance to get entries a few years back. The judge was trying to decide between Jock, who was one type, and one who belonged to our friend, John Woodson. He had a bigger, meatier dog. The judge kept sending us down and back, down and back. You could see the wheels turning as he tried to decide. Jock was a perfect gentleman in most cases. Finally, Jock came back and turned and looked at me, and then deposited the biggest load he could in that show ring. That helped the judge decide. He immediately gave the Breed to the other male. John and I left the ring laughing hysterically. Jock knew exactly what he was doing. He was tired of that mess and wanted to go home! (laughter)

There were a few other challenges that I had with Jock that made me really start thinking about the psychology of dogs, or maybe just this breed in general. At one time or another, with a litter of puppies or two, we might have had as many as 22 dogs. They never challenged Art. He was always "top dog" so everything was fine. Most of the time, I didn't have a problem either, but occasionally Jock would tend to ignore me. I had a really difficult time establishing eye contact with him. He would look away and would not give me eye contact.

We went to a show once, and we were very late getting back. It was after dark, and I had a bitch in season that we had left at home. We were going to leave the males in the car until we had let the females all run, because otherwise they wouldn't run unless she did. As soon as we put them back in, we would let the males run. We had turned Jock loose in the front yard, and all of a sudden he disappeared. I was yelling, "Where's Jock?" Jock had cleared our 42-inch fence; I have pictures of him doing that. He had cleared our chain link fence and had gotten into the backyard. He had the female way back in the far corner. It was ten o'clock at night. There was no breeding or anything, but he was certainly giving it a college try. I got a lead on him, and he refused to walk on lead. I had to literally drag him two acres back up. I was so angry with him. Finally, I got him in the kennel run. We put the lock on the gate because he was also smart enough to go through and open all of the kennel gates. My daughter was in college at the time. I told her, "When you come home, don't let Jock out of the run. I don't want him running. He isn't allowed to run." I was so angry with him that I wouldn't let him out of the kennel run for four or five days. He was just beside himself because this female was in season.

About the time she was coming out of season, I put a real short lead on him and took him out to walk in the front yard. Every time he would get near a tree or bush and would try to lift his leg, I would jerk him off balance to let him know that he was not allowed to that. We went through this process for about a week or so. He was not allowed to leave my knee except for a few inches. He would walk with me. I talked to him the whole time, probably in an unhappy voice. When the day came that he went up to a bush or tree and stopped and looked at me, I thought, "I think I have his attention now." So I put him on a longer lead for about a week or so, and went through the same process. With that, I came to realize that I had to establish myself in the pecking order, or I was going to be out of luck with this guy, because he was so extremely intelligent. I had to go back and reinforce that every so often.

Dolly and litter.

I tried working him in obedience a time or two, and that was a mistake. My thought is that you don't want to start with the smartest dog in your kennel if you question the level of intelligence between yourself and your dog. He would go along with me up to a point and then, after that, it was, "Ignore her." I would put him in a down-stay or a sit-stay, and I would walk away. Then I would look at him and all of a sudden he would look at me, give me eye contact, and then get up and walk about ten feet; not far enough to say "I'm running away from you," but just far enough. Then he would proceed to sit or lay, whatever the command was, at the place of his choice. When I was trying to work on the mouth and taking things, I would throw a stick, and he would go get it and bring it to me. I would throw it a second time, and he would bring it a little slower. The third time, he would go get it, pick it up, and then walk over and lay down under a bush, as if to say, "You want this stick; come get it." By then, I was laughing so hard. I thought, "This is ridiculous. We aren't getting anywhere here." I never did succeed in obedience with that dog. It was always fun with him because you could see him thinking, "What in the world is that woman trying to do?" Then, he would – typical man – go do what he wanted to do in the first place.

Of all of the dogs that we have had, I can say there were probably three that were intelligent to the point of thinking. The rest, I think, had the group mentality, the pack mentality, if you will. They would respond as a pack. Not aggressively or anything like that, but whatever the pack was going to do and the alpha bitch or top dog did, they did too. We had three. One was a Shih Tzu, one was a Berner, and one was a Petit Basset Griffon Vendéens. He was probably the only dog that we had that also had a sense of humor, and he would use it all of the time. Berners were more of a working breed so their senses of humor were not as highly developed as that Petit's was.

Was Jock the biggest character of any dog you had?

Gwen: Yes, we had a couple of other clowns, but just his thinking ability was constantly challenging you. You had to concentrate more with him.

Do you think that you can trust the pedigrees in this breed as to accuracy?

Gwen: Probably as much as with any breed, maybe more so than some breeds. I would say, people being human, that maybe 95 to 97 percent would be accurate.

How have you used inbreeding, linebreeding or outcrossing, and when do you think each should be *used?*

Gwen: I never did do inbreeding. The gentleman that I had worked with, and who had been in dogs for many years, had firm beliefs as to why they would work or not work. I don't think I ever had enough confidence in myself to do inbreeding. Then, too, being from the South, you hear so much about humans and inbreeding; I didn't want to do that to any of my dogs. We did some linebreeding, and I would say, to a degree, it worked out. But I seem to find that I did better with crossbreeding simply because I could bring in the traits that were much more obvious. I know that there are a lot of strong believers in linebreeding, and it certainly has a lot of merit. But, it seems to me that if I did some linebreeding, and then took a product from that linebreeding and did an outcross, I could bring something back in that maybe I felt my developing line needed and didn't have at that point. Maybe if I had bred a lot of litters, I could have experienced more success.

Art: Or if we had gotten into it twenty years earlier.

Who or what do you feel has influenced your breeding the most?

Gwen: I have read a lot of books and done a lot of studying, but I think the influence in my breeding has been as much observation and seeing the dog that I picture in my mind as a result of the AKC standard. I think that governed any decisions we made. We didn't travel great distances in order to do breeding, because all of our dogs mean more to us than to put them on an airplane and ship them long distances. If there were a reason that we were going there, then we would.

We did breed one of our females far away. This was rather surprising. A friend of ours was going to New York for a show, and a dog was there that I wanted to breed to. He took her up there. She was due to come into season within the next month or six weeks, and the lady up there agreed to keep her. That bitch decided not to come into season until six months later! (laughter) In the meantime, luckily, there was plenty of space. I talked to Bev Burney, and she said that it wasn't a problem. When she was bred, we drove up and picked her up. I've always been apprehensive about shipping dogs; you always hear scary stories. I remember more of those than the good stories. It's funny because we did a lot of traveling in order to show our dogs. We would build our vacations around dog show circuits. You could actually get into some areas and see where all of these dogs looked alike because the owners never went beyond, say, 200 miles to breed their dogs. Bernese Mountain Dog owners tend to be very conservative. We went into Georgia, through Louisiana, back up through Knoxville; and you could see the different types of dogs. A lot of the people were just like us; thinking, "Hey, so-and-so has a good dog, so we will just drive over there and do the breeding." The more we traveled, the more we realized that you may have to go a distance to find a good stud dog. That is why we had the imports shipped in. We had two, but the second one did not work out at all. He was placed in a pet home very early and went dysplastic.

Ch. Jock de Vilmouin, Annapolis, 1983.

How many dogs do you keep now?

Gwen: We only have one Berner now. When we first moved to Florida, five years ago, we had three. We have lost two of them. We accidentally discovered that the one we still have has a tumor in one of her lungs. We are still going through the x-rays and the "What-do-we-do-now-coach?" thinking. We always want to have a Berner; we have a couple of leads out about getting a replacement.

We looked forward to retiring because we thought we would have time to be with puppies and go to dog shows, but after we retired, we found that there is another life out there. When you have five to fifteen dogs, you can't lead that other life.

In the meantime, we had kind of gotten into Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, and we found out quickly that there are probably more physical problems with Cavaliers than with Bernese Mountain Dogs. As my friend, the professional handler would say, "All we have now is dead wood." They are all up in age; they are fourteen, thirteen, twelve and our Berner will be nine in April. All three of the Cavaliers have medical problems. They have heart and arthritis problems. With all of the medications that we keep supplying, we will wait until our population diminishes, so we can go down to one or possibly two Berners that we can travel with. We would like to be able to travel more, but we'd like to be able to travel with the dogs rather than having somebody come in or having to put them in a kennel or whatever. Until we can get down, we (or at least I, I'm not sure about Art) look forward to getting another puppy, probably in the next year or so. Right now we don't know how much expense we are going to have with the ones we have.

How many dogs were the most you kept?

Gwen: We had kept an average kennel of maybe six or seven. Those were usually young puppies that were developing, or older dogs that had finished their show time. Only on rare occasions did we place a dog into a home, and that was after we were guaranteed of the quality of home and kind of care they would get. Otherwise, they were ours, and we kept them until they went to the happy hunting grounds.

How did you come up with your kennel name?

Gwen: Right after Art and I were married, I got a letter from my brother who was a writer with the Air Force. He addressed it to King Arthur and Queen Gwenivere at Camelot. It had never occurred to me the association of the names until we got the letter. So, we decided that would make a good kennel name.

Have you named your litters by any sort of scheme, for example, first litter with "A" names, second litter with "B" names?

Gwen: No. It never occurred to us that we would be breeding so many litters that we would need to keep track of them alphabetically. I can see now that it might have been a good idea. We tried to name the dogs with some sort of personality trait, or something we saw in them as puppies, or whatever attracted us at a given time.

Do you feel that you have established a distinguishable line?

Gwen: Yes, I do. I'm very regretful in a way that we weren't able to continue and keep it up. The dog that we have now is one that we purchased; however, it does go back into our line. We had been to a specialty in Pennsylvania when my friend, John Woodson, and I were standing at ringside and watching the bitches being shown. I think there were 25 in the ring. I kept seeing this one and thinking, "Man, she is a beautiful bitch." She ended up fourth. I asked John, "What attracts me so to that bitch?" He looked in his book and said, "She comes out of your line, that's why." I was able to pick up on that subconsciously, I suppose, because she had some of the physical traits that my bitches had. The one thing that they have not had is a lot of the cancer problems. That is what the breed club is researching so much now; coming up with cancer-free lines. We are finding out more and more, that is hard to do. This one may have histiocytosis; I don't know. I have one radiologist's report with a list of the things that might be wrong in the lungs of this dog, but we haven't had any final tests yet. One of our original puppies, that had to be put down a year ago, was over thirteen years old. To say that most of my puppies have lived to be ten years old or older is certainly a plus sign with the breed.

What are people looking for when they think of your line?

Gwen: They were never extremely flashy, but they had good substance; and, as I said, we campaigned a few of the males. But it was our females that we seemed to excel in. If you have a good male, and you are going to breed your male, or someone is going to breed to him, they want top of the line, A-Number-One, across the board because they don't want to breed down. But if you have a bitch, you can always look for that male that has so much more to offer. You can breed up with a bitch. I think people were looking as much for personality and what could work into their lifestyle. Almost all of our dogs were house dogs.

How would you rate type, temperament, and soundness in order of importance?

Gwen: All of them are of equal importance; it really depends on what you are going to do with that dog. If you want a house pet and a family friend, if you want an animal for your small children, then you want temperament. Temperament and soundness would have to run a close tie. But you can have a dog that is dysplastic, which doesn't mean it is going to be crippled, and that dog can be an asset to your family for years. Type would only enter into it if you were looking for show quality, or if you are looking for something you really wanted to breed. Then type would be number one. Otherwise, I would say temperament. You could have a beautiful, typey dog that might eat your arm off. You don't really want that.

Shyness, to me, is a pronounced disadvantage in the breed. I've seen a few aggressive dogs, but mainly those tended to be males that were used at stud quite a bit; if they saw another male, of course, there is that territorial thing. I have heard a couple of scary stories about Bernese Mountain Dogs with extremely bad temperaments. They have been moderate by comparison. You can go to almost any large dog show and you will see some shyness in the ring. That bothers me more than some of the other aspects of personalities in the ring. I can't always say that is the fault of the way the dog was raised. With any large dog, as they grow bigger and quicker, they tend to get left home more when you go shopping or here or there. With the little dogs, you can pop them in your lap and off you go. So maybe being left at home could cause some of that.

We raised most of our dogs when we lived out in the country, and we didn't have flocks of people over. The dogs were always glad to see people and were happy and bouncing around. I don't think it is all environment. Some of it must be an unknown inherent problem.

We had a Siberian Husky at one point. At six months old, we could take him out and show him. He was a wonderful dog. We took him to a match one time in the middle of the summer. It was hot and the dogs were asleep in the van under the trees. All of a sudden, they started yelling for the Siberian Huskies to be in the ring. We ran over, jerked them out of the van, put the leads on and ran them into the ring. From then on, that dog was almost a wet noodle. He was just gone. We had a friend who had dogs, and she said, "Let me take him home and work with him." She was able to work 24 hours a day with him, and after about three or four months, she brought him back. He was fine.

Since then, I have read that sometimes dogs will go through puberty and can develop personality changes and a shyness streak, similar to children as they are growing up. This may sound sexist, but it also may be that way with boys more than girls. All of a sudden, when they start realizing that physical changes are happening, it affects their mental attitude. I really think that the age of this dog, and the shock we presented him with, was enough to totally shatter him. It took a lot of working with him to recover. This girl would lay down on the floor to get lower than his head so she could look up to him. Eventually, he came out of it, and he was a beautiful dog. He had been, for about three to six months, a vegetable case.

I began reading more about the psychology of dogs. There is a time when you can do something that is going to scar that dog in some way or another. Maybe that is when some of them become shy. Maybe at six to nine months something might happen that all of a sudden startles them.

We went to one show in New Jersey where there was an elderly judge that was held in high esteem. He had been hospitalized with pneumonia, and he had just come out of the hospital a few weeks before. It was springtime, but it was a nasty, bitter, windy, damp day. When he went into the show ring, he had on a big raincoat, a big hat and sunglasses. Every dog that man went up to shied away from him. Here was a person that was dressed in a fashion they weren't used to. Also, maybe he wasn't feeling well. We thought he was very rough with the dogs. Most of the dogs would shy away from him or look over their shoulder at him. Something as simple as that could startle them.

The first Berner that we ever had was totally raised by women. The breeders told me that every time she was around a man, that bitch would totally fall apart. They thought that bringing her into our household could work that out. It didn't; after three or four months, she was still panic-stricken. My husband would lay on the floor under the coffee table, and she would let him pet her. But as soon as he would make a move to get up, she was gone into the bedroom and under my daughter's bed, where she would stay. She was petrified of men. Now, we don't know whether somebody had frightened or abused her, but she was extremely sensitive. I'm not going to say that Berners are more sensitive than other breeds; but there is a sensitivity level and perhaps, at a certain age, that can affect the dogs adversely.

Do you have a long-range goal in breeding dogs?

Gwen: Not really. We may have lost our chance when we backed out of breeding and showing, a few years back. As a result, the line that we were developing has totally gone by the wayside. I do know two or three people who still have sons or grandsons, daughters or granddaughters from one of our dogs. The one I have here is the granddaughter of one of our better males. She didn't turn out to look at all like the sister I saw in the ring. This was a repeat breeding.

When I contacted the girl about the one I had seen, she wasn't interested in selling that bitch, but said she was going to repeat the breeding. She did, and we went up and picked this one out. She didn't develop to look like our line at all. She's a very sweet dog, and a very nice dog. We had her x-rayed, and when she came up dysplastic in one hip, we decided that it didn't make sense to show her. Why would I show her if I'm not going to breed her? I'm certainly not trying to add numbers to my belt. I'd like to get back in it, but certainly at a much lower level than we did before. We would not approach the dog shows as aggressively as we did; because, like I said, we traveled all of the way up into New England. We were with the first Bernese Mountain Dogs who went to Bermuda, when they were accepted by the Bermuda Kennel Club, to be shown. There were eight of us that went over. We carried two, and we had a wonderful time. The local people couldn't have been nicer. We traveled and planned our vacations around dog shows to places we hadn't been to before. We would not do that now. In checking the dog show calendar that is put out by the Virginia Federation of Dog Shows and Breeders, there are dog shows almost every single weekend right here in Florida. Most of them are indoor shows because of the heat. We wouldn't have to travel so aggressively. We still spend five months or so in Virginia, and our return would be the time for a great number of shows in and around that area. You are taking a chance if you have nothing to start with, and then you buy. Even if you look at the sire and dam and buy show quality, there is no guarantee that you will get that show quality. If and when we get our next dog, it will be with the idea that if it is show quality, we will certainly show it, but hopefully, we are smart enough now to know that if it isn't show quality, we aren't going to embarrass the breeder by taking it out.

You said that you had the perfect idea of the Bernese Mountain Dog. Could you describe, conformation-wise, what would be your perfect Bernese Mountain dog?

Gwen: I would want a nice shaped head that didn't look like a Collie or a St. Bernard; a nice, gentle head. The thing that has bothered me for the last few years is the high tailset that we see. It seems to be improving. At the Specialty last year in Arizona, I didn't see nearly as many of the high tailsets. That isn't a Berner tail; it's a Siberian Husky tail.

We went to Crufts in England a few years back; we were lucky enough to go three years in a row. In those three years, all of the males, in particular, had high tailsets. We would sit at ringside, and we would shake our heads and wonder what was happening to the breed. Was the back getting shorter? When I look at the Berner, I want to see a Berner that is a little longer than he is tall. I do not want to see a square Berner. A square Berner cannot be harnessed up and put all of his body weight into towing that cart. He has to have room under his body to reach and pull. If you get a square Berner, you are going to have overreach, and overstep.

I like to see a nice smooth topline with a reclining tail. I like to see a dog that is four-square with not too much angulation in the rear. I want a modification of that angulation, but enough there for digging in and pulling that cart. Also, good sturdy bone. If I was going to buy a dog now for obedience, I wouldn't go for that sturdy bone. I would buy a finer-boned dog or bitch because the officials have not dropped the jump requirements. They are working on dropping the jumps, I believe, but the dogs still have to jump quite a distance. I would want a dog that was more compact, maybe, and fine-boned; but something that can actually get out and perform in obedience.

Carrie, December, 1980.

Also, pigment is a minor thing that is down on the list, but I see an awful lot of dogs that don't have the good black pigment. There is a lot of the flesh-colored pigment in the lips and so forth. I'm not sure that can be corrected with breeding. Because it doesn't affect type, temperament or soundness, a lot of breeders don't think about that at the top of their mind. When you see a dog with a lot of pigment, you want to see those dark eyes. I have had one or two that had the lighter eyes. But back when we first started in the Bernese Mountain Dogs, eyes were down further on your list when you were making your purchase or breeding your dogs.

Why do you think some dogs look good when standing or posing but not when moving?

Gwen: Soundness, or lack thereof. We took some handling lessons, where you go out and over and come back. You can see one type of movement when that dog goes out and comes back to you. You are looking for a level topline. You aren't going to see that at an angle. If you watch a dog go back and forth, and that topline is moving in any form, it indicates that there is something wrong in the movement; either the length of the leg or the soundness of the dog. You want to see a dog that floats. The topline looks like it floats over and back. That indicates generally that the dog is structurally sound, and that it can move very comfortably.

We did have one female, and this was probably back in that first or second litter, that we went to a fun match with. The judge was very impressed. There were only two Bernese Mountain Dogs there, and we had them both. He kept saying, "That is a very nice Bernese but take her down again because she is pacing on you." I thought, "Pacing? Aren't they supposed to do that?" I took her out and back. He said, "No, take her out again." About the third time, somebody ringside, I don't know if they took a picture or what, but there was a clicking noise, and it was just enough that it startled the dog to change her motion. I could feel that dog on the end of the lead smooth out. I came back and the judge said, "That was much better. Number one."

He saw everything in that dog, but she rolled when she moved out and back. Once she stopped pacing, she smoothed out the top line, got nice and level, and did very well.

Well, we had to actually train that dog on how to move in the show ring. Her normal movement was to pace. We checked with a number of veterinarians to see if pacing is genetic; it is not. It is how they learn to walk. Just like people sometimes learn how to walk with a swing, or whatever.

So we started working with her in the back yard. We took a venetian blind cord and tied it to the left hind leg and right front leg. Not tightly, but enough so that when she moved she had to move those legs in unison instead of pacing. She would stumble the first step or two, and then she would get the idea of what to do. I would move her out a time or two, and Art would say, "Okay, that is good." Then, he would move her out and back until she was okay.

After repeatedly doing that, we began to realize that as soon as we put the show lead on her, she seemed to know what to do. Then we cut the rope in two but left it tied to her front and hind leg. There was nothing there; we just cut it. As soon as we tied her two little pieces of rope to her leg, she knew that was how you were supposed to do it. Finally, Art said, "Okay, as soon as you start to leave the judge to go out with the dog, take a real broad step. Just enough to throw her off balance." That finally worked.

We actually had to train her how to walk in the show ring. As soon as she got out, she went back to pacing just like a hyena.

So, how should they move in the front coming toward you, and from the side?

Gwen: Coming toward you, it should be straight from the front. They should not be elbowing out. It should be a smooth, parallel movement; certainly not any hackneyed type of thing. We learned something from our friend, the professional handler, when we had Shih Tzus. We were getting ready to go to a show, and it was an outdoor show. He said, "How does your Shih Tzu move in the grass?" We asked, "What do you mean, how does she move in the grass?" He said, "Well, normally she is in the house or on the cement. You are going to be in the grass, so how does she move in the grass?" We said that we didn't know, so we took her to the park that night after we got home from work. Sure enough, she looked like a rabbit trying to go through the tall grass.

We began to realize that here was something else we had to consider. At a lot of your outdoor shows, you might be at a fairgrounds where the grass hasn't been mowed well. We had to make sure that the dogs could move comfortably in tall grass or short grass. We didn't want them to be overreaching because of just working in the tall grass either. We had two acres in our back yard that they ran in; sometimes it was cut neatly and sometimes it wasn't.

But, on a sidegait of a dog, I want to see the topline very level and very smooth. I want to see the dog enjoying that stretch out. I'm a firm believer in moving your dog on a loose lead. I was aghast at the number of handlers showing their dogs at Westminster this year; the dogs were so strung up that you wondered how they could even breath. At our handling class we were told that if your dog has a poor front movement, elevate it a little bit with that lead so that it kind of tiptoes, and you may fool the judge. We had a whole bunch of lessons on how to fool the judge in case your dog had this fault or that fault. Or if you are ever a judge, what to look for. With a loose lead, you cannot destroy good movement. The few that I watched that had the dogs on a loose lead looked like they were as happy as could be. With a Berner, I would not fault a dog for single tracking simply because that same dog, if you put weight behind it, will broaden in the rear in order to dig. A lot of the dogs will single track when they are totally relaxed because there is no weight there and no pressure for them to work on.

What are you looking for in the head?

Gwen: In the male, I want more of a triangular head, and a rounding dome. I don't want the earset too high or down too low on the head. If it is about midway of the skull, when that dog shows some animation, the ear goes up. If the earset is too high, when the dog shows the animation, it looks like a Cocker Spaniel that hasn't been groomed.

I want the muzzle to be almost equal to the length of the skull. Not too short or stubby, because then you are back to the Saint Bernard look.

We had a judge, a few years ago, come up to us at ringside when we were showing in Norfolk; we had two brothers out of the same litter. One was a very good male, very typey. The other was leggy and had a narrow head. I only needed one point to finish the typey male. I thought, "Okay, here's where we do it. If anybody shows up, great. If not, I know I have one point, one way or the other." This judge came up, and he wanted to start judging Bernese Mountain Dogs. That was right after AKC had started requiring judges to visit various kennels and talk with breeders. I guess this was his way of visiting a kennel. He was asking about the Bernese Mountain Dog, and he asked if I had bred these. I said that I had bred them both. Finally, I asked him, after I had moved them around a bit, which one he liked the best. He picked the long, leggy narrow head. I thought, "Whoa." I then asked him "What is your original breed?" He answered, "Salukis." I said, "No, you really don't want this in a Bernese Mountain Dog." I was trying to be very careful and diplomatic because I might be showing to him next. I tried to point out that you don't want to look for that Saluki trait in a Bernese Mountain Dog; that the whole dog structure should be a little different.

I want the female head to be a little more delicate than the male. I want to look at the two and be able to say, "That is a dog, and that is a bitch." Unfortunately, the first bitch that we ever had, many people thought she was a dog because she had so many of the dog traits. She weighed 98 pounds, and she was a tall dog. But from her I realized that although she was a sweetheart in herself, this was not what I want to take into the show ring down the road. We got a championship on Carrie because we were willing to travel to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New

York. There were no Berners at that point being shown in the state of Virginia, so we had to travel. We got to see a pretty good cross-section of the other Berners at that time. From that, I realized that I want to be able to look at them and say, "Dog, dog, bitch," or whatever. I want a little bit lighter head on a bitch than I do on the dog. Maybe not as much of a dome or as much of a stop. Maybe a little more ladylike.

Should they have a parallel plane in the head or down?

Gwen: You want a parallel plane. You don't want a down-faced dog.

How serious are missing teeth?

Gwen: Well, again I have to go back 25 or 27 years when things like that were not important. In fact, when I had my first one x-rayed, and she was dysplastic in one hip, I talked to our veterinarian. He was not a show veterinarian or anything, but he was very down-to-earth. He said, "Let's look at it this way. She does have dysplasia, and you may want to breed her very cautiously. At the same time, she has so much else to offer the breed that if you didn't breed her, you may regret it later because she can contribute so much." At that point, I began to think that hips are very important, but not the thing that should be the prime governing criteria. Now, my views are totally changed. You have a lot of selection out there, and you have a lot of top dogs. You have a lot of good healthy, sound dogs so you don't have to breed just for the sake of breeding. Unfortunately, if a person has one dog, and they have put all of their hopes and goals into this one dog, it is a little devastating to be told that you shouldn't breed this dog.

How important is the eye color?

Gwen: As a breeder, I would be looking at other things unless it was a very, very light eye. As a judge, I would be looking for all of those important points, and light eyes would fall in there also. Again, it goes back to the fact that years ago you had to breed or purchase what was available. Now, you don't have to do that. You can look more for the coloration and pigmentation.

Jock.

If you could rate the whole dog on a point scale of 100, how many points would you assign to just the head?

Gwen: Probably 25. That is encompassing the structure of the head, the bite and everything together.

How important do you consider pigment to be, and would you breed to a dog with missing pigment?

Gwen: Yes; however, I do think that it is important. I think that breeders should be aware of it more and more. However, if the dog fits this mental picture that I have got, and it is sound, pigment is not something that I would turn it down for.

What should be the relation of the chest depth to the rest of the dog be? Should it be to or below the elbow?

Gwen: I wouldn't want it below the elbow. You have to think of this as a draft dog; the dog has to have room to really move those shoulders and so forth. If the chest were too deep, it would limit the flexibility of that front movement.

Does there seem to be any problem in the breed today of the chest not having enough depth?

Gwen: I don't think that I can honestly say that, simply because unless you have put your hands on a lot of the older, mature dogs, that is where that total development is. So often what you see in the show ring are dogs that are between the ages of six months and maybe three years, who might be just finishing up their development at age three. Let them stay home for six months or so, and then see exactly where that substance goes. Many of the dogs that are being campaigned are younger dogs, and they are still developing that body.

Has it been your experience that coat is very important to winning in the ring?

Gwen: Yes, and I can say that because I have been on both sides. We came down to Georgia one spring, and the dogs down here did not have the dense coat that ours did from being up in Virginia. They just looked beautiful when you saw them. When we came down into Florida and were thinking about retiring down here, there was a young man over in St. Petersburg who had two Bernese Mountain Dogs which he had gotten from Ohio. We called him, and we asked if we could come by and visit him and his dogs.

Jock.

Unfortunately, this young man, whether he lived alone or not I don't know, but his two dogs were totally outside dogs without any benefit of air-conditioning. He had a huge cinder block building with openings on four sides so the dogs could get out of the weather. But the dogs looked perfectly weird. All you saw was head and a scrawny body because they had no undercoat. All of the undercoat was gone. They had the guard hair, and that was it.

When you go into the show ring and see a dog that is heavily coated, it can mean one of two things. Either the dog is from up North, or the dog is kept in air-conditioning and protected so they do keep that coat. Another important thing is grooming to go into the ring. We have always gone in with a clean dog that is well combed out, with ears and feet trimmed. We didn't manicure our dogs. We have been beaten by manicured dogs, though maybe we were not always beaten because the dog was manicured. However, when you see a dog that is, what you see is a beautiful dog that could be on a calendar in your kitchen or somewhere.

As the competition has grown over the past twenty years, the method of grooming and displaying your dog has changed. We were at one of the shows in Pennsylvania where they had outlawed powdering your dog. One of the ways to keep this white looking so nice and brilliant is to soak it in powder and whatever, and then try to brush it out. A professional handler in the rain with one dog was once given the Breed. The handler turned around, not realizing what the breeder or groomer had done, started patting the chest of the dog, and when he did, a great big snowstorm came off of the dog. The judge didn't see it because he had turned and was writing in his book. But everyone at ringside's mouths fell open because that is a no-no. There are various ways, though; like using chalk that doesn't fluff.

Coat is very important, probably more so when you are in a heavy competition. I don't know the dog that won the Breed at Westminster. I don't know if it was a younger dog, but I was very surprised that it lacked the drippy coat that I have seen on so many other dogs. It also didn't look like it had been manicured and shaved all around. I was surprised because if it was a male, I thought it would have a heavier coat.

Obviously if you have bitches, they won't be as heavily coated because twice a year they come in season, so twice a year they are going to blow coat. All you are looking for in a bitch is a nice coat that isn't lacking, but isn't as dense as the male has.

We have a picture here of a male Berner that was brought over from Switzerland. The owners were coming here for a year. They arrived in late summer because he was going to teach at a college in Richmond. The dog was beautiful, the hair and the coat on that dog. I said something about shedding, and he said, "Max never sheds." Well, in Switzerland maybe they never did, certainly not to the profusion that they do here. But come springtime, Max started shedding and these people were devastated. They thought something was wrong with their dog! It was just changing the environment and the location. So, you want to be sure that if you are breeding a dog you have enough coat there that the gene will carry.

I think that handlers have gotten away from giving some form of arsenic to dogs to increase coat growth like they did years ago. It had to be done very carefully and be withdrawn carefully. In other words, like steroids, you had to reduce it gradually. Hopefully, that isn't done nowadays. There are ways to accomplish that goal without sacrificing the health of the animal.

What about different coat colors?

Gwen: The first two Berners that we had were black, rust and white. Maybe not all the same amount in the same places. When we had the first litter of puppies, we thought all of our puppies were mismarked. They had the black and the white, but the rust was almost a fawn color. It wasn't the bright, rich rust. I got on the phone and started calling people in Pennsylvania and wherever, wanting to know what was wrong and what I had done wrong. They said, "No, that is just the puppy coat. As they grow, that richness will come in." And it did. Also, with the black, as the puppy starts to lose the puppy coat, the black comes in a lot glossier than it was.

Ten or twelve years ago, we were at a specialty in Wisconsin, and a lady came with her rust-and-white Bernese Mountain Dogs. She had brought them on request, probably from the Board. The dogs were beautiful and perfect in every respect and probably could have been shown, except for the fact that there was absolutely no black. I was so taken with the colors of the dogs, but the Berner is a tri-colored dog, and there was some fluke in the genes that in this particular litter, there were two or three that came out pure rust and white. I have never heard of any one else with that same problem.

I talked with a Swiss breeder just after we had our second litter. I asked if they had a hard time finding homes for their mismarked puppies. She looked at me and said, "I never have mismarked puppies." I thought, "Wow," and again, in my naive manner, consulted this friend of ours in Pennsylvania and asked if you can breed so as not to have mismarked puppies. She said, "No, but you can always have a bucket of water beside your whelping box." I thought, "How cold," and I just shriveled up inside. To think that anybody could take a newborn puppy and stick its head in a bucket of water because the markings were off! We did have a litter of major mismarked puppies, but we had no problem in finding pet homes for them. It wasn't a problem. Markings are always a challenge. If you think you are going to breed for markings, there is no guarantee that is how it is going to come out. You might get the white cross, or you might get the white bib. You may have no white on the paws or nothing on the tip of the tail. However, you're hoping that the judge is going to judge your dog with markings in that ten percent factor.

Have you observed that some constellations of markings go up more often than others? Do markings make a big difference to judges?

Gwen: If it is a Berner breeder-judge, (and there are not a whole lot of them,) no, I don't think so. Maybe the only time it would be obvious to the ringside bystander is if the judge is having a difficult time choosing between two or three of equal quality. Then he is going to zero in on those markings and try to come as close as he can to that perfect, beautiful Berner. On the whole, I think that most judges tend to go toward soundness and movement.

What is the ideal front? Should the layback of the shoulder be forty-five degrees with a corresponding layback of upper arm, or should it be more moderate?

Gwen: Forty-five would probably be ideal; but, at the same time, I think there could be some variance in that. A lot of Berner people work their dogs in obedience, and the forty-five degree would be geared toward that draft dog. If you are going to compare the draft dog structure with the dog you work in obedience, they would be different. They would not be the same. There are a lot of owners and handlers who have been able to take their dogs through conformation, obedience, drafting, all of it. I don't think that should be a locked-in thing, as long as he can move with the rest of his body.

What do you consider ideal in the croup?

Gwen: If the croup is too short, you will get that high tailset. I would much rather see more of a curve to the base of the back, so the tail is more in repose. More of a smooth curve than an abrupt stop.

What about tail length?

Gwen: This is one of the things I was looking at last year when I was judging Sweeps. The length of the ear to the eye, for ears, and the length of the tail to the hock. If you look at a dog fully coated, you can't tell where that tail actually stops. I was surprised, particularly in the males, that many had a short tail that didn't come down all of the way to the hock. To balance out the dog all of the way that tail must come down at least to the hock. Not the tailcoat, but the tail itself.

You have talked about correct topline. Anything you would like to add to that?

Gwen: Not really, although again it is something of interest. We had one bitch that showed beautifully, and we had all kinds of positive responses from judges. She had a perfect topline. We bred her, and she had a large litter of puppies; but, from then on, her topline drooped down like some of the old horses. She never recovered that topline again. You could put her into the ring, and if you boosted her up a little in the rib cage, that topline would straighten up, but her natural repose was with that off-line topline. This is something that can occur in bitches that have been bred, but you want a smooth topline. We never did campaign her much after that because we would have had to cover up something. You can cover things up when the dog is standing still, but not when it is moving. Your most critical observers are breeders outside of the ring. You are not only showing that dog to the judge; you also want to show off the pride of your kennel. You can't really do that if you have faults, like a poor topline.

What is the ideal height in a dog and a bitch?

Gwen: About 24 inches for a bitch and 27 for a dog.

What is the ideal foot?

Gwen: The ideal foot is a cat foot, up on the toes. You see a lot of angulation in the wrist. Down in stifle. You want the dog to have nice straight legs with a cat foot. A lot depends on the age of the dog and the weight of the dog. Standing is one thing, but seeing it move is another. If the dog is weak in stifle, it is not going to have that real sound movement that you are looking for as a judge. A lot of times, it's like faults in your children. If you live with them all of the time, you tend not to see them, or they aren't as important to you as what you will find a judge is looking at in the ring, when he is going over your dog point

"Beach Boys," San Francisco, obedience.

by point.

What is the ideal temperament?

Gwen: Males should certainly not be shy or aggressive. At the same time, off of their own terrain they should be a little on the reserved side. Certainly the females are usually much more obvious. They are much more protective of their homes than the males, or at least that is what I have found.

The temperament should certainly not be aggressive; that is the last thing that you need in a Bernese Mountain Dog or in any working breed. Bitches tend to go into a very reserved state, usually after their first season.

You don't need to yell at the Bernese Mountain Dog. This is one of the things that I would always try to emphasize when I was selling a puppy. The bigger the dog is, doesn't mean the harder of hearing he is. Just change your voice inflection. If a stranger comes to your door, perhaps selling something or asking directions, keep your dog close to your side, maybe with your hand over the ear. Talk with a very business-like, clipped manner. Deliver the information, close the door and tell the dog what a good dog it was, and then walk away. If it is the neighbor from next door or Aunt Susie, start patting the dog vigorously and make sure your voice is happy. It won't be long before the dog, no matter where it is in the house, will go by your voice inflection as to whether you are happy or whether you are serious. In the very beginning, when people would take Berners to obedience classes that were open to all breeds and all varieties, often the instructor would want to be a little harsher on a Berner because they were thinking of a German Shepherd or a Rottweiler that is a little more set in their ways. But a Berner tends to be very sensitive. It doesn't take a raised voice to get their attention except maybe as a puppy, but not one-on-one as a member of your family.

What do you think are the most serious or most common faults in the breed today?

Gwen: Temperament-wise, I would say shyness. Physically, unfortunately, it is the percentage of cancer that our breed has. Those are the major things. Hip dysplasia is definitely a problem. However, it depends on the degree of crippling, because some dogs are in more pain than others and need special care. Some dogs may have dysplasia in both hips, but you will never know it because they are in no pain and are jumping and romping around. So, I'd have to say that a breeder has to be concerned with shyness and the cancer prevalence.

Do you think that the standard is a good one?

Gwen: I think it is good. They toyed around with it for awhile, and now I think we have a really good standard.

Do you think that there should be any disqualifications?

Gwen: Other than color, definitely aggressiveness should be a disqualification, and maybe the degree of shyness. Sometimes a dog might shy back, but it may be just the individual or just an odor.

Another thing is, we sold a dog to a couple; he was a heavy smoker, and she was not. The dog would go lay with him until he lit up a cigarette, and the dog would get up and leave. We have known dogs that were raised with non-smokers and then when they came into the proximity of smokers, you could see the dog drawing back, like it was an odor that it was not familiar with, maybe not offensive but a strange odor.

To fault a dog would have to be, in a broad sense, lack of the temperament. The dog, if we are talking show here, should be dismissed. If it has a limp or something, I've seen a judge send the dog back out so that everybody knew that dog limped, but he didn't excuse it, he put it at the end of the line. I don't know what message he was trying to send. If I was judging, and I saw a dog with a limp, I would certainly want the person who owned that dog or was handling that dog to be aware that there was something wrong. It may be a temporary problem, or it may be something worse than that. Certainly as a breeder, I would not want one of my owners to bring in a dog that is limping.

When I was judging Sweeps and I was doing the Seniors, we had a female in the ring that limped very badly. It was a very large ring, and I was afraid that every time I moved that bitch in and about and around, I might be hurting her and creating some stress with her. I finally said to the owner, "She's limping very badly. Would you like to be excused?" She was very indignant and said, "No." I understood that this was a senior bitch, and if the owner realized she was not in pain, then we could go with this. In a younger dog, I would have insisted that the dog be excused. Something's wrong, and the dog does not need to be in the ring. It needs to be outside of the ring.

Do you think that all champions should be specialed?

Gwen: Yes, I do. We have not been attending shows in the last five years, except sporadically, but it used to be that when you went to a show, and let's say there was a sizable entry there, and you looked at the age of the champions, rarely did you see a male champion that was over three or four years old. Our question was, "What happens to these guys? Where do they go?" You might see the females being campaigned a little bit more. In campaigning, you are showing how the development of your dog or bitch has continued to hold.

The thing that impressed me so much about Change of Pace was the first time we ever saw him, at a Florida show. I watched the dog, and he was happy and bouncing and full of energy. As a breeder, I would have guessed that dog's age at between two and three. But Pacer was five years old and was still bouncing and spry, and having the best time of his life. I made my decision right then that he was a beautiful dog, and he had a lot going for him, including possibly longevity. So we made the arrangements and did a breeding with Pacer as a result of that.

As a rule, you don't see a lot of your older dogs unless you have a specialty where you bring out everything; the blind, the lame, and everything. When I go to a dog show, I want to see the mature dog. Are they still there? Are they holding up? I'm very proud of the older dogs that are able to show. Maybe from a breeder's viewpoint, they are not interested in breeding this bitch anymore so why should they bring her out? I can understand that. Perhaps in the meantime, a person is concentrating on one or two younger dogs. To me, it is more important if I have two or three bitches at home that I want to breed, I want to see what is out there. If all of these dogs are staying home after the age of three, I don't see them. I want to know that a dog that is five years old or seven years old is still moving well and still beautifully holding himself up. That may be the dog that I want to breed to. Maybe I don't want to breed to a dog that is three years old and is not quite proven yet. Also, by the age of seven, you can usually track back and find out if this dog has been bred before, and if this dog has adult children that you can look at and see and talk to owners. So, yes, I do think that they should be campaigned.

Does making the Top Ten or Top Twenty mean anything?

Gwen: It does to the owner. It means that I have not thrown all of my money down the tubes for no reason. There are also those people out there who will only breed to the top five or ten dogs. They will do anything in order to breed to that dog. However, we never were inclined to go that way. Maybe it could have been interpreted with Pacer, but I would never have bred to Pacer sight unseen. I never want to look at a picture and say, "I want to breed to that dog because it is a pretty picture." I want to see that dog in action. I want to be around that dog. Is that dog going to bite my arm off or something? There are people who will believe that, in order to insure the full sale of a litter at top dollar, you breed to the Best of Breed at a specialty.

Do you think popularization would help or harm this breed?

Gwen: I think that popularization harms any breed. I heard the term "cursed with popularity." Let's use the Chihuahua that is the Taco Bell thing now. It is an adorable commercial, and how many hundreds of people have gone out and purchased a Chihuahua because of that commercial? They know nothing about the breed. They know nothing about the personality. It has been that way from *101 Dalmatians* on. Any time there is a dog that is popularized or pictured a great deal, there is always a group of people who want to go out and purchase those dogs. They are not investigating if this dog will suit their lifestyles. Can they afford this dog? What are the medical problems in this dog?

Barri at four months old in November, 1988.

Art: Same thing with the Shar Pei when they first came out.

Gwen: I have to give credit to the Bernese people. They did hold the popularity down for a long time. The breed has been accepted by the AKC since 1939, but it was forever before you started seeing them in commercials. Now, it was the first or second of January that they had a Bernese Mountain Dog on TV, and interviewed the owner. The man who did the interview said that in his opinion, the Bernese Mountain Dog will be the dog of the next millennium. I don't want to hear that at all. Coincidentally, the second dog that he had on was the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and, of course, we have both. (laughter) He was saying how the Cavalier was ideal for apartments and elderly people. I thought that this was scary. How does that saying go, "We were western before western was cool," because we had both of these breeds. No, I hate to see dogs publicized much. It becomes a matter of supply and demand.

Do you think that judging is fair? And if not, what do you think can be done to improve it?

Gwen: Well, it depends on if I just lost or not, as to how fair it is (laughter.) No one likes to be defeated, but we have always taken defeat if we feel that we were beaten by a dog of equal or better quality than ours. If we felt that we were beaten by a dog that didn't move as well or something not as obvious, it always comes down to the bottom line. You don't know what the dog is like until you put your hands on that dog. To compare your dog to another from inside the ring, to outside of the ring, well, you can't do that except for what your eyes can see. If you are a breeder campaigning and you decide to cross over and become a judge, you should stop breeding and showing your own stock. Because there is going to be another judge out there who is going to look at your dog and the good old buddy system is going to fall into place somewhere.

When we were very active with the Warrenton Kennel Club in Virginia, whenever they had the annual show, we hosted the judge's dinner. We had the opportunity of picking up the judges and bringing them back. In many instances it was in our home, and we would have the dinner there. We were always told, as a club, to mingle with the judges and make sure they were having a good time, but don't show up if you are going to show a dog tomorrow. The thing of it was, those judges didn't want to mingle with the Warrenton Kennel Club people; they wanted to mingle with their buddies. They had seen each other last month and asked where they were going next year and talked about their contracts to do so-and-so show. That is what they wanted to talk about, so you let them. It was not a seated-at-the-table thing; it was a buffet. So they chose where they wanted to be.

Regarding judging, there are probably other thoughts and other reasons for their choice that you don't know about. To ask, "Is there anything that can be done about it?" I would say no, because if AKC has taken this long to be able to get in and start flexing their muscle on puppy mills, what good would it do for me to write in and whine about a judge whose choice I didn't agree with at the last dog show? What you can do if you feel a judge had made some unwise choices, is you can write to the host club who chooses those judges. If they receive two or three complaints, and not all from the same breed, they may want to not consider him for the next show. They will go somewhere else. We know this because we have been in Board meetings where this has happened. So, if you feel you have a legitimate complaint, not a whiny "I-really-wanted-that-point" kind of complaint, write to the club that sponsored that particular judge. I'm not sure anything can be done. It is like the judge that I told you about before, that entered the ring in the raincoat, with the dark glasses and the floppy hat, and scared all of the dogs. You aren't going to go back to the AKC and say, "I'm sorry that Mr. So-and-So has been really ill, but he scared my dog." What is the AKC going to do except to say, "Too bad." So, no, I don't think that there is a lot that can be done.

Would you personally rather show under an all breed judge or a breeder-judge, and why?

Gwen: There is a challenge to both. If you show under an all breed judge, that judge hopefully has traveled around the state and country enough to see a diversity of Bernese Mountain Dogs. He is therefore not going to look for a certain type in yours. We have been out of breeding for awhile, so I got my hands on the most recent standard, and I studied it so I could reinforce that picture in my mind. I firmly believe that I did not choose a single dog, out of any of the winners that I chose, just because it looked like what I had produced in the past.

A breeder-judge can be very challenging. We once had a bitch that was very good, and she had some good wins. There was going to be a show in western Pennsylvania, and a friend of ours asked if I was going. The judge was a Bernese breeder-judge. I said, "No, because the judge doesn't care for us, and I am not going to provide her with the opportunity of humiliating us in the ring. We aren't going to go, but there will be a lot of people there, and you will have a good time." He said, "Tell you what, let me take your bitch, and I will show her." I told him okay, and it was kind of interesting. She took Best of Opposite. The judge was talking to John when they were getting ready to do the picture. She was a rather abrupt person, and said to him, "Who are you? I haven't seen you around Bernese Mountain Dogs before." He said, "My name is John Woodson, and this dog belongs to Gwen Russell." About that time, the picture was taken, and you have never seen such a shocked look on a woman's face in your life, as when she found that she had given my dog Best of Opposite. It was very rewarding both for the win and for having that picture made. So, sometimes it depends on where you stand with that person. If you have been in heavy competition with that person or you have been very outspoken in pros and cons, that can carry a subconscious weight on their choice in the ring.

What do you think that poor judging is more a result of: politics or the fact that the judge doesn't know the breed?

Gwen: I can't say any more that it is because the judge doesn't know the breed. There are a lot of Berners out there now, and they are being shown everywhere. If the judge has an eye, he is going to know the breed. A lot of clubs, prior to the judge arriving at the dog show grounds, hand out copies of the standard so the judges will know what they are looking for, as a refresher. We came out with a brand new standard a few years ago, and someone in New England took it upon themselves to send copies of the new standard to all of the judges, because it was an updated standard. One of those judges was furious because they had been provided with the updated standard. It was like questioning her ethics or something; but that was not the intent at all. Maybe if it came from the host club, that would be one thing, but not from the breed club. A few years ago politics probably did play a role in choices. I'm not so sure that it is true as much now as it used to be. We have so many more opportunities, and so many more dog shows, that judges don't really "suck up" to a club or a breed to be chosen. All they have to do is be good.

Do you think that advertising influences judges?

Gwen: No, I don't. A good example of that is listening to applause at ringside. We have stayed a lot of times for Best in Show, and you will have various people, although not Berner owners as a rule, who will sprinkle themselves all around, so that when a dog is running around they are yelling and whistling and maybe rattling keys and doing all of this stuff; and I've seen judges totally ignore it. I know when I'm in the ring, I'm so busy concentrating on the dog, the handler, the grounds, whatever, that I don't care what is going on outside. If a train went by I wouldn't hear it. So, I like to think that the other judges are sort of deaf to that, and maybe blind with the advertising.

I do know that when a dog in New Jersey or New York was doing very well being handled by a teenager, that picture stayed with a lot of judges because that dog was going into the Group ring a lot of times. They would remember the combination, and they would look at her maybe two or three times and give her the win or at least that second look. It also helps if the dog is really good, which this one was. But that isn't advertising; it isn't the same thing at all. That is campaigning. If a judge sees these people, and they have been in a lot of rings and have had a lot of wins, then the judge may think, "Let me look again. Maybe these are really good dogs, and I should give them a ribbon also."

Do you think it is ethical to retouch advertising photographs?

Gwen: From my point of view, if I'm going to judge that dog, I'm going to be seeing that dog in person, not with a touch-up here or there. It isn't going to make much difference. I don't know why you would touch up a picture, because if anybody has been studying that dog for any length of time, they are going to know that it has been touched up. I'm not sure that it would be worth the effort to do it.

And, as you said, you wouldn't breed to a dog that you hadn't actually seen.

Gwen: Right.

We talked about showing your own dogs versus using a handler. Is there anything you would like to add about that?

Gwen: I would advise people that are starting out brand new to go to a lot of fun matches. In Fredericksburg, we had what they called socialization classes. Go to a lot of those. And definitely take some handling classes. The main thing is you can have the top-notch, A-number-one dog, but if you don't know how to show that dog, it isn't going to show either.

A good example is when the Professor came over from Germany. We have seen how they show in Switzerland, and it is very casual. Well, he wanted to show his dog over here, and maybe get his American championship. Max was a beautiful dog. That dog was so well trained and so attuned to his master; I have never seen such a bonding between dog and master. Whenever there was a breeding, the bitch would come in, and this man would speak to his dog in German, and Max would sit there like there was nothing anywhere. Then, on command, he would approach the bitch to attempt the breeding.

I was amazed because our dog, Jock, the one that I said was so smart, sensed that there were times in this cycle when the time wasn't right, and he didn't need to bother, but he also knew when the time was right and then nothing would hold him back. The bonding between this man and Max was amazing.

I tried to give him a few tips before going into the show ring; his response was, "It's not important. I'll just show him as I have always shown him." The dog would automatically stack, but when he was moving the dog in the ring he wasn't bringing out the best in the dog. He was so different in manner from anyone else in the ring that the judges would almost just dump him. The dog was a Swiss/German/European champion. The last time he was entered, the owner vowed that he wasn't going to show him. He was going to pull him.

Art and his wife talked him into letting me take him into the show ring. I took him in and worked with that dog. I figured that this was the first time I had ever worked with the dog so he might just laugh me off totally, but he worked well for me and let me stack him, and did everything he was supposed to do. The judge had a really difficult time. I didn't win but that dog was certainly in consideration. Later on, the judge was telling me just how impressed he was with the dog. The man who was handling the other dog came up and told me, "I have never worked so hard for a win in my whole life." So, a lot has to do with how you handle a dog.

Before, if you sent your Berner into the show with a professional handler there were whispers around the ring; it just wasn't done. You showed your own dog even if you fell on your face. I felt that if it was a small entry, I could do it because it was fun. But when it got to be a five-point major, and I needed it, I would get nervous, the dog would get nervous, and I would fiddle too much. The sensible thing at that point is to look for a professional handler that knows and understands Bernese Mountain Dogs. I would not frown on someone who chose a professional handler, but if you can do it yourself, that is even more rewarding. To get a championship from the Bred-By class is, to me, certainly a special win.

Have you ever handled for other people professionally or as a favor?

Gwen: Never professionally, but just for fun. I found that I could usually handle someone else's dog much easier than my own. I didn't know all of their little quirks and traits, and they didn't know mine. Jock could play on my weaknesses. He knew what they were in a heartbeat. If I were showing someone else's dog, it was like, "Okay, I'd better behave because I don't know what this woman wants me to do." But, no, I never did it professionally.

How do you train puppies and at what age do you begin?

Gwen: You should start when you are separating them from the litter, basically with lead training. You start right off with walking them on the left side. Use a different type of lead if you are going to work with them on show mannerisms. Also, use a different lead if you are taking them to the park or wherever. Never go for too long at a time. Certainly, you don't have to do it every single day. When the dog gets older and is ready to enter in matches, you want to make sure that the dog is responsive to you. That it has manners and knows not to jump up and put both feet on the judge's clothes. Don't wait until the day of the show and then decide that you better run around the yard a few times. That isn't going to do it. A slow and gradual process is by far the better.

Art: We always had short show leads and when the dog was on the show lead, he knew; he would walk with you and wouldn't try to run off. But if we brought out the other leads, he knew that, too; he would be sniffing and doing whatever at the end of the lead.

Gwen: Yes, he knew that the show lead was his "dress-up clothes" and he behaved.

Do you attend fun matches and training classes?

Gwen: We did; we don't now because I have no idea where they are here, and I have nothing to train at this point. But certainly, even older dogs profit by going out to matches and socialization classes. Something that I find to be so sad is when you have taken a dog out and campaigned it, and it has done so well with you, then you start concentrating on another dog or bitch, and you leave that first one at home. It is devastating, because they don't know what they did wrong and why they are being punished.

We were getting all of our dogs together and getting ready to take four of them to a dog show one time. We were going to do Jock last because he was the easiest. Art would get into the shower, bathe one and bring it out, and I would blow it dry. We had the van door open, and I had all of the crate doors open so I could take them right to the van. Jock was just about to lose his mind, so finally I let him loose in the big yard. When I went to look for him, he was gone. I couldn't find him. I looked everywhere and called, but I couldn't find him. Art had to get his clothes on and go out to look, too. I happened to walk past the van door, and he had jumped two fences and gotten into the van! He was glued to the back of the crate and wasn't getting out. He was sure he was going to be left behind. We had to put the lead on him. Once you put the lead on, he came willingly. Once he got into that shower, then he knew he would get to go. But until he got into the shower, he was sure he was going to be left at home. I can't think of anything any more disheartening to an animal than to be left behind and never taken out.

Art: It is like now. Every time I start up the van, all of our dogs go crazy.

Gwen: They think the van belongs to them. If you start up the van, they think they are supposed to be in it.

Do you believe in obedience training?

Gwen: Yes. I wish I was better at it. A certain amount of obedience certainly does help when you go into the conformation ring. Whether you want to go all of the way with it or not, certainly depends on the individual. We have some friends who will do nothing but obedience. It is a one-on-one relationship. However, we did try and made weak attempts, and it was embarrassing to find out that the dog was smarter than we are. (laughter)

Art: It is fantastic to watch someone like Allison Jaskiewicz with her dogs in both obedience and conformation. Her dogs really respond to her. She puts the hours in; that is one thing that we never had when we were working.

Gwen: Yes, we were both working and time was limited when we were showing on the weekends. We were lucky enough that the times when I tried obedience, the obedience instructor was also a dog handler; so when I explained that I was going to continue showing the dog in conformation, she said, "Okay, there are certain exercises that I want you to do a little differently."

For example, when I stopped I did not want Jock to automatically sit down. So she said, "Instead of stopping, turn sideways as you would in the show ring and then we will give him the command to sit." But you don't want to be in conformation and every time you stop, the dog sits. He is well-mannered, but that isn't what the judge is looking for. You have to be very careful when you work your dog in both obedience and conformation.

So you think that there may be some pitfalls and problems in doing both?

Gwen: Yes, although it can be done as long as the handler or owner is aware of it. Also, I have seen dogs who were so obedience-trained that you could see them anticipating the next move. When you are in the conformation ring, you don't want that anticipation. You want the dog to be spontaneous with the movements that you are going to instruct that dog to do.

Have you done any tracking, agility, pulling, or sledding?

Gwen: We tried carting a few times. We tried with Jock, which was a mistake. We borrowed a cart and equipment, and every time we harnessed him up, he would look back as if to say, "What is that thing behind me?" It was an aluminum cart, which was probably the wrong one to start with because he never had any pre-training. Jock had good hips, but as soon as he realized that you were going to bring those cart tongues up, he would go flat to the ground. There was no way you were going to get him up.

However, we sold a dog to a lady in Connecticut, and she took him out and tried to train him to the cart. They had a cabin in the Adirondacks, and they wanted to haul in wood. She tried her best, and her neighbor came over one evening and told her, "I have had more laughs over you and your dog! I just had to come over and tell you how funny it is watching you." While they were talking, the three-year-old grandson went over and climbed up and sat in the cart. The dog looked back, tested the harness, realized that there was weight behind him and he started pulling the child. He did not want to pull an empty cart that evidently rattled and disturbed him. He was not going to go, but as soon as there was weight in that cart, he was fine. She said that he hauled lots of firewood out of the forest up there. It couldn't have been better.

Tracking started a little later where Berners were concerned. It looks like a great challenge; I wish that we had the dog and the opportunity to do it.

Agility is just a scream. The first agility we had ever seen on a professional level was at Crufts. People were fighting to get tickets; a ticket was needed to get seats. We had tickets, so we decided to go see what it was all about. It was a blast to watch those dogs work with their handlers. We are too old for it now; we would have to have a real tiny dog. (laughter) It seems to be one of the most rewarding things you can do with your animal.

That is usually done by the owner, right?

Gwen: Yes, the one who spends the most time with the dog.

How intelligent is this breed in comparison with others?

Gwen: They are very intelligent. It is hard to gauge other breed's levels of intelligence. We have had Shih Tzus, Petite Basset Griffon Vandeens, Siberian Huskies, and Bernese Mountain Dogs. I've seen degrees of intelligence in the others.

As an example, when we went to Bermuda, we met a little lady from Baltimore who had a huge German Shepherd. I mean, much bigger than the American German Shepherds. She was going over to show in obedience. We spent a lot of time with her and her friend who were both obedience people. We asked her which breed she felt was the most intelligent.

She said, "I'm going to say the German Shepherd. Not because I have a German Shepherd, but there was a story about a gentleman who went to New Jersey for his Seeing Eye dog. While in training, he came out of his room one morning and the door opened for the elevator. The dog crossed in front of the gentleman, and wouldn't let him get on it. He started pushing the dog and actually started striking the dog, until someone walked up and discovered that the elevator wasn't there. The door was open, but the elevator was halfway down. Had the dog let him go, he would have been injured. Had it been a Poodle, the first time you yelled or struck that Poodle, it would say 'Let's both go,' and down the shaft you would go. But with a German Shepherd, once they learn what they are supposed to know, even if you are going to insist, they will not let you do it if they can possibly help it."

So, to say a Berner has ever been tested for that same type of loyalty or not, I don't know. I know that some we have had have been really intelligent and some, I have felt, really had a head like a rock. I think that is probably true of most breeds.

Do you think it is appropriate to take them anywhere off-leash?

Gwen: In this day and age, it is almost impossible. There are a few places where you can take your dogs. There seem to be a lot of people claiming dog bites and suing. Suppose your dog is attacked by another dog? We never take our dogs off-lead anywhere. There are sometimes when I wish we could, but for safety's sake, they are much better off on the lead.

How important is training in winning in conformation?

Gwen: Probably very important. Even if you have a mediocre dog, if you and your dog are both ring-trained, you can show that dog off to its best advantage. If you are not trained or your dog is not trained, or – heaven help us – neither one of you is trained, don't expect that judge to be the epitome of patience and do it for you. We did have a judge in the Fredericksburg area that was noted for his pomposity; he would invariably take the handler or owner and would spend several minutes talking to them, and then give points to that dog as if to say, "You really need my help, and you really need my advice. Let me give it to you and as a reward, I'm going to let you win." It got to the point that we would never enter under him because he was so unpredictable. You could go in with all of the polish in the world, but the guy who stumbled coming into the ring would get the attention and maybe the point.

Do you think that big-name handlers help dogs to win?

Gwen: I can't say for the last five years, but from past experience, yes, I do. If you get a big-name handler, chances are that he and that judge have had a couple of beers along the line and he is going to say, "If Joe or Mary has this dog, it must be a good dog because he/she doesn't handle just anybody's dog." I think that whether they win or not, they will get that second look and probably be in the ribbons.

Do you have any advice for owners who would like to handle their own dog?

Gwen: Start out when your dog is young. Be sure you have some basic training yourself. If you are nervous, you are going to make that dog nervous. You have to be sure that you have yourself under control. Be relaxed. Have a good time. Start out in classes that might give you the opportunity to go into the ring twice; either Bred-by, puppy class, Novice or American Bred. Chances are, if you win that class, you get to go back in again, and you will double your experience that way. The main thing is to be relaxed so you can enjoy it, and the dog can enjoy it too.

You have trained the dogs over the years, but what have the dogs taught you?

Gwen: Don't ever underestimate your dogs, particularly if you have three or more. If you have three or more, you have a pack. Even though you may be alpha bitch or top dog, in that pack there is also a pecking order. You want to be sure that you are aware of that pecking order because you could have some problems along the way.

This is what is happening with Rottweilers and sometimes with Dobermans. If those dogs all of a sudden get loose, they aren't going to hang around your front door. They are going for a walk somewhere to see what they can see. Three or more is my limit, because that is when I began to realize that Jock was playing with my head. I didn't realize it until he brought it home to me. We had about five dogs in the kennel at that point. He knew what he wanted to do, and I wasn't going to interfere with that. I had to establish myself at the top in that pecking order. If you have three or more dogs, and I don't care if they are house dogs or yard dogs or kennel dogs, be aware of what you have there.

Also, don't underestimate the amount of attention that individual dogs might need. You might have a dog that is perfectly content with a pat on the head and a cookie now and again, but you may have another dog that needs more assurance than that. It is a lot like children. "Don't yell at me because I will cry," or "Hey, you have to yell at me a lot, or I'm not going to hear you." The same thing applies to the dogs. Be very attuned to their personalities and their temperaments.

Were your breedings natural or controlled?

Gwen: I would like to say that they were all controlled, but there were a couple of times when I couldn't say that.

Art: When Jock unlocked the doors!

Gwen: We once had a bitch in season, and we had six kennel runs. We had one kennel run with two dogs in it. When we came home that afternoon, every single one of the gate latches had been flipped up. We had locks, but didn't think we needed them. Dog food bags had been ripped open; there was utter chaos in the kennel. Jock was the only dog that was still in the kennel run. His gate was open, but he was laying there smugly. I said, "Gee, do you think he got to the bitch?" He wouldn't tell us. We kept checking her and everything seemed fine; we checked her at 58 days, and things were still fine. Normally, I would determine if a bitch was in whelp by coming up behind them and putting my hands on their belly area. Not to frighten them, but they will tense up if they are carrying to protect their babies. Otherwise, they don't care and will just stand there and wiggle to get more scratching. I did all of my checking, and everything seemed to be fine. In three days time, we had three puppies. They had to be Jock's because he was the only male there. He had gone through and opened every single kennel run, did his breeding, gone back and laid down. He let all of the other dogs take the blame for the devastation. We had two breedings like that, but all of the rest were planned and controlled.

How do you help a mating along?

Gwen: In the beginning, we were kind of stupid about it. Luckily, we never had to breed a virgin dog to a virgin bitch. As long as you have one that has been down that road before, it is not an effort. We bred Jock the first time to a previously bred bitch, and it didn't take long for him to figure out what this whole process was about. The only time that we did call for help was when we tried to breed the male, and he had no sperm. All of the sperm was dead. He was trying and didn't know which end to go to. He was the virgin. The female tried to help the best she could. We called the vet who was a friend; he came out to the house and tried his best to help. Finally, we got a tie and nothing happened. In the meantime, he took some sperm back to the office and found that there were no live sperm. So, whatever the problem was, I don't know. The main thing was to keep the two animals from absolutely blowing their minds and getting exhausted in the attempts. If the male has been bred before, generally there is no problem. You just hold the female, not hold her by the head, but you are at the head, and be reassuring. Some females aren't happy about being bred. You just want to be sure that your male isn't going to be attacked in the process, particularly if it is somebody else's bitch that you have there for breeding. We never had to interact a whole lot.

Do you think that the stud fee should be the same for proven as well as unproven males, regardless of titles?

Gwen: From our viewpoint, if we had an unproven male, we charged a lesser stud fee; or the cost of a puppy, or a puppy back. Once he was proven and had maybe been campaigned and done some good stuff, you could maybe raise that stud fee a little bit.

We did have a problem one time with one of the males that I wanted to breed to. The owner came up with this wild concept that I had never heard of before, where you paid so much up front and then paid so much for every live puppy after three or five days or such. Her theory was that when you sell a litter of puppies, it is the bitches' owner who gets all of the money. But at the same time, my argument back to her was that you can breed your stud dog three times a week and get stud fees for that. I can only breed my bitch once a year, and that is all I get out of that. We argued back and forth and finally someone stepped in and gave her some advice, and we solved the problem and went on about our business. That was the wildest that we ever faced. When you call and want to breed and ask about a stud fee, if it is high, you either accept it or reject it. That is your choice. We never did charge outrageous fees for our studs. We always wanted to guarantee our puppies. We felt that if we were charging $1,200 or $1,500 for a puppy and all of a sudden, three of the puppies out of that litter had a problem, we would be refunding a lot of money. We wanted to keep our prices in a range where if something happened to that dog, we could refund that money in a heartbeat, or intercede with medical attention or whatever was needed. Or, maybe the people would say, "I only paid $500 or $550 for it so forget it, we are okay." So we never went for top-of-the-line price either.

Your males were at stud to outside bitches?

Gwen: Yes.

Did you ever refuse an outside bitch?

Gwen: Not really, because I think that there was enough discussion that went on prior to the breeding date. The only thing that I ever really refused to do was when we were selling a litter of puppies. Some people came over two or three times and seemed very interested. They had chosen a puppy, but it boiled down to the fact that they had a Bull Mastiff at home and they wanted to buy a puppy for their dog. They wanted a companion for their dog! They didn't want a Bernese Mountain Dog. They were willing to pay the price we were asking, but I thought, "Now, wait a minute. My dogs deserve better recognition than this. I'm not going to sell a puppy to people who want it as a pet for their dog." That is the only time we turned down anyone.

What faults would keep you from breeding to a dog if everything else were outstanding?

Gwen: If I knew that the temperament wasn't good, I wouldn't breed to it. I would want to know what the elbows and hip x-rays were. That would have to be in the up-front information. Then, the only other thing would be, does this dog have in himself or in his background, what I need in my line?

Do you think it is a good idea to breed to the top winning dog regardless of pedigree?

Gwen: No, that is a mistake. Your pedigrees have got to blend and match. You have to know a few more details about the dog. Just seeing him at the specialty or at Westminister, doesn't tell you all you need to know about that dog.

How many litters do you think a bitch should have? What is the oldest and youngest that they should be bred?

Gwen: They should not be bred before two years of age or, at least their third heat cycle. We always waited until two years of age. Berners tend to come in at six months, so they can have three heat cycles and still be under two years of age. We always held off for maturity's sake; bone structure and whatever. We bred Dolly, which was the top breeder that we've had, six times. We had waited a year, and she had litter of three. One had died so she had two. That was the litter that she had out in the snowstorm and one puppy died. She came into heat again and, in the meantime, we had found Max and wanted to breed to him. We consulted our vet and told him how old she was, and that she had five litters up to that time. This was the only opportunity that we would have for this breeding, so we asked what he thought. He examined her thoroughly and said, "Physically, she is in fine shape. Even though it was only six months since her last litter, there were only two puppies so it did not drag her down, and she did not suffer physically. I would say to breed her." So, we did. That was her last time. The most we ever bred with any bitch was six times, and the last time with the advice of the veterinarian. There are a lot of people who only breed their bitches four times, and that is probably wise, too. As to age, a lot depends on the condition of the bitch. To breed a nine-year-old bitch is cruelty. At the same time, a lot depends on the health factor.

Do you help your bitches to whelp?

Art: Yes.

Gwen: One time, when we had two litters simultaneously. We had one bitch whose name was Wildflower. We tried to breed her at the appropriate times, but it never took. Finally she came into heat, and we had already bred one of our other bitches, but I said that this was the last time that we were going to try. We bred her and, by golly, she took. We had two litters born three or four days apart. One was a litter of twelve, but we lost one. The other had five. We were puppied up to here; we vowed that it would never happen again. The only salvation was that my daughter was there, and she got to bottle-feed the puppies to supplement them. She thought that was great fun. She got to bottle-feed them, and burp them and she stayed for the whole time that we needed her. My mother was visiting also; she was from the old school where you never paid for a dog. People gave you dogs; that was how you got dogs. She was commenting to my daughter, "I don't understand your mother, having all of these puppies and all of this work. Look at all of this." She said, "Well, Granny, she sells them for $350 apiece." You could see the wheels turning in Granny's head, and then she said, "Can I help you?"

Do you help them during the birth or just afterward?

Art: I have had to help a couple of them during the birth.

Gwen: He is excellent. I don't know whether it is his long skinny fingers or what. I panic; he works with the dogs. We had a Shih Tzu whelping once, and we had the vet on the phone in the middle of the night. She had been in labor for well over an hour; finally we had called the vet. He was talking to Art and telling him to turn the puppies this way and that, and whatever. He said to call him back when it was all over. Art did all of that, and the puppy was born and everything was fine. With Shih Tzus, you have to hold them in between your fingers head down, and flip them vigorously to clear their throats, because they are so tiny and have a pug nose. Unless they start breathing on their own right away, you have to do this. This little dog was really slippery and slimy. Because of the long labor, there was another immediately on its way. How we normally did it was he helped the bitch while I stood by with the alcohol and the string to tie off the umbilical chord. But there I was with this puppy, flipping it to get it to breathe and it wasn't breathing. We thought it was dead because it had been in the birth canal for so long. All of a sudden, he yelled, "Hurry up. There is another one coming." I flipped it down and the puppy slipped out of my hands and disappeared. I couldn't find the puppy and was yelling at him, "I can't find the puppy." It was three o'clock in the morning. Finally, he yelled, "Get over here and help me." So, I went over and helped him. When I had a free minute to go look, I found the puppy had slid across the floor into the track of the sliding glass doors. There was this little puppy, and I picked it up. I was in tears and all of a sudden, I heard this sucking noise. It had opened it's mouth and you could watch this little blue puppy turn pink from its nose on down. I cried and cried. We named that puppy Last Chance.

Apparently, throwing it on it's head didn't hurt it because the people who bought it said that was the smartest dog they ever had. They taught it all kinds of tricks. I thought, "Maybe you should throw all Shih Tzus on their heads." (laughter) But, no, we always stood by, and we always assisted. We never did a lot of manipulative things unless it was necessary. We did leave one Berner bitch on her own; we said, "It is a dog's nature so let's leave it alone and let nature take its course." We did, and she had six puppies, but in trying to sever the umbilical chord, she went way up into the tummy and we lost three or four to blood poisoning. The only thing we could blame was that she was totally unassisted. Normally, we didn't lose a puppy. That was the last time that we let Mother Nature take her course.

Have you ever had to supplement feed very young puppies?

Art: Yes, by tube and by bottle.

Gwen: He is very good at that, too. He should have been a doctor.

What do you normally supplement with?

Gwen: Esbilac. The first time we had to do it was on a weekend; we came up with a formula that I had read in a book. I don't remember it now. As soon as the vet was open, we were over there picking up the Esbilac. It was a lot easier. When we had the litter of twelve, we had to supplement feed because, of course, mom couldn't deal with all of that. I couldn't see dragging a bitch down totally just to let her try. Whenever we had more puppies than the mother had buttons, we always supplement fed.

Do you wean the puppies yourself, or do you let the bitch do it?

Gwen: We were inclined to assist because Berners tend to have large litters. Rarely did they have only two or three. That is a rare situation. They usually had five or more, and as the puppies got older they became more voracious with their eating. We would watch the mother and finally, she wouldn't even lay down but just stand, and they would strip her of the milk in no time at all. So, we would start supplement feeding at four or five weeks. Eventually, the milk would start drying up. We usually had ours weaned at about five weeks.

But, we found out that if you let the bitch have access to the puppies until they are at least eight weeks old, she will provide additional training. She doesn't have to be closed in with them. If you provide access three or four times a day, that is when they learn their discipline from the mother. That is when they are getting their pecking order established within the litter. We watched with the litter of twelve until it was warm out. Then, we let them outside into a small yard that we had separate from the big yard. She would get up on top of the picnic table and watch. After awhile, she would go over and start knocking over two or three and lick them and have them follow her off somewhere. Then she would come and get back up on the picnic table and watch some more. She then might go over and knock one over stem-winding. We never could really figure out what she was doing. At one point, she took four of them way over to the far end of the yard and left them there. Evidently, they were playing too rough or something, and she felt they needed that separation. Eventually, they came scrambling back. To watch the mother with that litter was really interesting; to see how she separated them from the group and so forth. There is a lot of learning that they absorb during that time frame. If you separate those puppies from their mother at five or six weeks, they aren't going to get it.

At what ages do you begin to evaluate the puppies for pet or show quality?

Gwen: With markings, we started off right away. Whenever we bred, it was for something we were looking for. From the whelping box, if there were some whose markings we didn't think were that great, we would put them in the pet-quality grouping. Bernese Mountain Dogs can stand at about eleven days; their eyes aren't open, but they can stand like drunken sailors. From the time they were able to stand, if we wanted to keep a male, we would put all the males together and compare them. Gradually we would narrow it down. At about age six weeks we could say which was the one we wanted to keep.

Basically, we never got heavily involved with the temperament-testing business. With our last litter, we did temperament testing following instructions found in the *AKC Gazette*. There were two people who had done it before, and they came down and helped. We graded them all, and it didn't work. The one that was supposedly the most aggressive was not. The one that was graded the most shy was not. I don't know whether it was our interpretation or not, because the rules you were supposed to follow were pretty cut-and-dried. I have participated in other temperament testing since then, but not with my own litter. With puppies in the whelping box, it is kind of hard to say what temperament testing you do at that point. We always had the whelping box at the bottom of the stairs as you went into the kitchen. When you went downstairs, the puppies that would make eye contact with you were usually the first ones that we would be taken with. They were usually listening for voices, and looking at us as something other than just food suppliers. The others were scrambling around for the food bowl or whatever. We would see more intelligence with the puppies that would make eye contact quicker than the ones that were more food-oriented.

Jock.

What should a show puppy sell for, and did you usually sell for cash or on terms?

Gwen: We sold on about any form except credit card. (laughter) We would state the price and always took a deposit on a puppy after the litter was whelped. Never before. We never took the deposit to the bank until the person came and picked up the puppy, and paid the balance for the puppy. If it was somebody that we knew really wanted a puppy, and we thought was deserving, we were perfectly willing to go on a payment plan or a co-ownership, or a puppy back or something. That varied by individuals. We were never locked in on a cash-only type of deal.

Did you use spay/neuter agreements?

Gwen: Not really. Back when we were doing most of our breeding, we were trying to find out if we were being successful in our breeding program. Generally, unless the puppy was heavily mismarked or something, if the person wanted to have the dog spayed or neutered because it was just going to be a pet, we would encourage them to do so. But, if they weren't sure, we would encourage them to let us reevaluate the puppy at six months to see what it looked like and how it was developing. Then, if it had something that we, as breeders, didn't want to perpetuate, we would encourage a spay or neuter strongly. Or if the people called and said, "Our dog is six months old and is a beautiful dog, but we still want to have it spayed," then we would tell them not to do it. We never would create an issue.

At what age did you place the puppies?

Gwen: After eight weeks.

What do you feed your dogs?

Gwen: Even with puppies, we started off with adult food. We would soften it with beef broth or something like that, and would mix it with pablum at about four or five weeks, especially if it was a large litter. Gradually, we would delete the pablum and take away the broth and just give them the dry food. We felt that it was much more advantageous for the dog to have a slow bone-growth rate rather than the rapid rate they would get from the puppy food.

Any supplements?

Gwen: No.

How important do you think diet is?

Gwen: It is very important. It is a working dog, and they need be able to have the capacity for drafting. You have to be sure that they have the proper nutrients to develop in order to do that.

How do you condition your puppies, as far as exercise and so forth?

Gwen: Generally, you let them run and play at their own rate. If you have bought a puppy at eight weeks, and you live in an area where you don't have freedom with a fenced-in yard, then by all means, they should have a nice long walk pretty consistently. Not once this week, and twice next week. They need regular exercise. Never encourage puppies to run up and down stairs. Never encourage half-grown dogs to jump in and out of the back of a station wagon. That puts too much impact on the front, too much weight; and their bones are still too soft to do that. If they have to go upstairs, you carry them if you can or they are leashed so they go up slowly and they come down slowly. None of this tearing up and down business.

What about agility with Bernese?

Gwen: Generally, you don't start agility until the dog is well over six months old anyway. You still let them start out at their own pace. I know that the idea of agility is to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, but you still want to be sure that the dog is structurally sound before you do that.

How much grooming do you do when you are showing this breed?

Gwen: The dog should always be shown clean. They should always have their feet trimmed, both around the pads and the hair between the pads. If they have any strings hanging off of the ears, that should be plucked or cut back. Really, they should be scissored to a minimum; but be brushed and combed really good.

But not manicured?

Gwen: No. They are working dogs, not Poodles.

How do you kennel your dogs? What is your setup like?

Gwen: When we were doing most of our showing and breeding, we had a kennel built with six runs extending from the back. It was air-conditioned and heated; 25 feet outside and six feet inside. We had one extra large kennel in case we had to put two dogs in the same kennel. Two of the kennels were covered over the top, and then we also had two acres totally fenced in. At least twice a day we could let all of them run loose. Twice a day we would walk them all of the way around the perimeter unless someone was in season. If that was the case, we did all of the females first and then all of the males. The facilities down here are not quite as nice, but then we do not have the population that we did in Virginia. We do have the air-conditioning and heating. We do have the ability to confine them to a twenty-foot run out here, and we also have an area that is fenced in. We rarely ever close the run doors. They have the freedom to run the entire area out there.

What advise would you give to breeders just starting out?

Gwen: Know your quality before you even consider breeding or showing. The first thing is to talk to other breeders. Find out what their strong points are, and what things they think are more important than others. Make sure they can honestly evaluate what they have. Is it going to complement the breed if they breed their dog or bitch? A lot of people will get a male and think that they can find someone to breed to. No, that isn't right. You want those people to come to you because you have quality, not because you have a male dog. Talk to other breeders, go to shows, and go to matches. Observe what is happening and be able to honestly evaluate what you have. Can you improve on it, or do you need something else to replace what you have?

Should they necessarily go to a kennel with big winners to purchase a puppy?

Gwen: No, because you may have a lot more puppies to choose from depending on the size of that kennel. You are looking for the ideal dog for yourself and the breed. You might find it there, but you also might find it across town at somebody else's house that has three or four dogs in their kitchen. It depends on what you are looking for and how knowledgeable you are in your search. It doesn't hurt to go to those kennels and talk to those people and see what they have. You have to evaluate if that is what you want, and if it will aid you in your purposes.

Do you recommend joining local, national, or all breed clubs?

Gwen: Yes, to all of those. You can become very narrow in your perspective if you only associate with those in your own breed. You need those outside experiences. After all, a dog is a dog is a dog. If you are having eating problems or a discipline or showing problem, your nearest person for information may be a Gordon breeder or a Cocker Spaniel breeder. By joining an all breed club, you can pick up on a lot of things that maybe you cannot get from just a regional breed club. But they are very important too. If a potential buyer calls you and says they are looking to buy a puppy, and they want this or that, maybe you don't have that but you can refer them to someone else who does. Or, two or three of you may have to band together to educate someone who may say, "I saw a Bernese Mountain Dog on TV, and I want two of them because I want to breed them." The first and most important thing that you need to know is the educational opportunities. You need to be able to provide that back to people who are buying puppies from you. You need to be able to provide them with every degree of education where Berners are concerned. If you don't have it, send them to somebody else who does.

Do you feel that the parent club is doing enough to educate judges and new members?

Gwen: I think they are. I was on the Board for twelve or fifteen years, and I know what we did at Board meetings. However, I heard a lot of criticism from people who were not that close to the Board, complaining "We never know what is going on," and "It has to be a big blow-up before we hear anything." Maybe that was justified, too. They are trying now to get the minutes condensed and printed in the *Alpenhorn.* They also try to make sure that there are enough breed clubs. While I was on the Board, they encouraged the breed clubs to operate together, not separately, from the national Board. In the beginning, there were only one or two regional clubs, and it was hard to refer people to a regional club if there wasn't one available. Now there are quite a few. If somebody called me from northern Virginia and asked me a question now, the first thing that I would do is refer them back to their regional club. They always have open meetings; they are glad to welcome people who are curious and have questions. Regional clubs really are great but they had to have a lot of encouragement from the national club to get started.

Is there an AKC video for this breed?

Gwen: Yes, there is. I've been told it is being updated. I haven't seen an updated version; only the one that came out about ten years ago. I went to Georgia to instruct a judges' study group about three years ago. I thought that the host club did an excellent thing: they had sent out a lot of notices encouraging people who were interested in the judge's seminar. They had three different days set up for the seminars. The local clubs had purchased a video for every breed. When I was contacted about doing the judges' seminar for Berners, I was scraping together all of the information I could get. I was calling here and there, and I got a whole lot of slides to go through. I was able to pick out what I thought would help in the presentation. When I got there, I found out that they had all of the videos. I thought, "Wait a minute. It is explained so well in the video." I quickly went through and modified the slides that I had. We went through the slides, the presentation, the questions and then the video. Then we had another question-and-answer period. We also had a couple of Berners there to do a "hands-on." It was an all breed club. I must have had about twenty people who were interested in judging Bernese Mountain Dogs, and that was in my seminar alone.

Do you think that there is adequate literature available on the breed?

Gwen: Yes, but you have to look for it. There have been a lot more books written now. When we first got into Bernese Mountain Dogs, we might find a book with maybe one chapter in it. The AKC had a small paragraph in their book. We got our first books from England and Switzerland on the Bernese Mountain Dogs. Now, there are more people here in the United States who are writing books on the breed. I have not read them all.

Any other funny or interesting stories about your dogs?

Gwen: One last thing; be very careful in what you name your dogs. We bought a dog from Long Island. It was our second or third dog, and she had already been named Wildfire. Her nickname was Fire; she had a fiery personality. At six or eight weeks, we were bringing her home in the van and she literally climbed out of the crate. I had to hold her all of the way home. She had a very demanding personality.

When we picked her out of the litter, the two girls said that they were so glad that we picked her because that was the puppy that would wake them up at five o'clock in the morning. That should have given us a clue. We were at a dog show in Pennsylvania once; Art has the attitude that his glass is always half-full while I feel mine is always half-empty. He was taking the dogs out of the exercise pen and was putting them into their crates. I always put a lead on the dogs until I got them into the crate, and then took it off. Well, he felt he didn't need that so he escorted her all of the way over to the van door. She took one look at the van and made a U-turn and went running off through trailers and campers. He and I went running through this herd of temporary homes yelling "Fire, Fire." We caught our dog pretty quickly because we received a lot of attention. Later we vowed that we would never name a dog something that we couldn't yell out in the middle of the street.

Then when we got into Cavaliers, a lady called and said she was reducing her number of Cavaliers and would like for us to consider buying one. We went over and she had a beautiful little male whose consistency of coat and head were beautiful, but he had a solid black blanket and that isn't what you want with a show Cavalier. Anyway, we bought him and a female. His name was Southern Comfort. He was a two-year-old male, and his call name was Whiskey. We had a house in Falls Church, Virginia, because we were working in Washington, D.C., and another place in rural Virginia that was 65 miles away. Generally, most of the dogs were in Falls Church with us; we would take them back and forth. Whiskey proceeded to discover, as small as he was, how to climb the chain length fence, with the female right beside him. If he was not there, she would never consider going over the fence. But, he would take off and she would be right beside him and the two of them would be over the fence and gone. We were out one night at ten o'clock roaming the neighborhood yelling, "Whiskey!" because we couldn't find our dogs. My thought is, when you are giving your dogs call names, be sure it is something that you can call out in the middle of the street and not be embarrassed about what your neighbors are going to think.

Did they think you were trying to sell whiskey or something?

Gwen: Well, we could hear a lot

of doors opening and closing in the area! People do a lot of strange things so I don't know what they were thinking. I told Art, "If we ever get that dog back, he is never coming up here again. He is staying down in Fredericksburg." Another time, he climbed out of a six-foot high run. I don't remember where we were, I would guess that we were at work; but my daughter was at home, and she looked out of a side window and here was a little black-and-white Cavalier running around outside. So she brought him into the house. She checked all of the gates, and they were all closed so she put him back outside. She stood in the kitchen, trying to figure out how that dog got out of the fence. She stood and watched him, and he went right to the corner and proceeded to climb up and drop over the other side. Then he would go to the forty-two-inch fence and do the same thing and get over that. We had to keep him confined in a covered kennel unless we wanted to run the risk of him getting loose.

How long have you lived in this location?

Gwen: We have been here for five years.

Why did you move here?

Gwen: We had been considering retiring and moving to Florida for quite awhile, and we had relatives here. Art was appreciative of the warm air and temperatures. Then, after Art had quadruple bypass surgery and was on blood thinners, he didn't like the cold weather in Virginia. He became more adamant that we retire and move to Florida. So, we did some shopping. We have a close friend over in Leesburg who is very active in Gordon Setters. We knew her in Virginia, and she was active in the same all breed club that we were. That gave us somebody to come down to. We do enjoy the winters although we have found out that over a period of five years your blood gets very thin; this is the coldest winter we have had down here.

Bernese Mountain Dogs do well in the South, but coat and conditioning is not the same. I have pictures of our dogs in the snow and cold of Virginia. The colder the climate the happier the dog.

Jock.

And where did you live previously?

Gwen: In central Virginia.

How old are you?

Gwen: I am 69, and Art is four years older.

How long have you been married?

Art: Thirty-three years.

Educational background?

Gwen: Art is a retired Navy man. He spent over twenty years in the Navy. I had one year of college, then stayed home and raised children for awhile. Art and I were both employed in military security, and couldn't really talk about our jobs except to each other. We found that by getting into dogs, there was a whole different lifestyle. Those people didn't care what you did the other days of the week. They were interested in the dogs and the showing. We had a trailer and so we used to get involved in the tailgate parties. It was a whole new exposure for a social life that we couldn't really have as far as our workplace was concerned. The other thing that was equally amazing was that we discovered co-workers with show dogs. They had found the same outlet that we had found with dogs. Another funny thing is when you are working and word gets around that you do breeding and showing. You would be amazed at the people who come out of the woodwork and ask you questions about their dogs. "My dog won't do so-and-so," or "How can I do this or that?"

Art: That was how we got involved in the all breed club. One of the fellows who worked in the Army and I had been to a couple of meetings, and we started talking and found out we were both dog people. That got us interested in going to the kennel club.

when I was coming through there he was on the phone talking about that black bitch." I started laughing and told her, "Patrice, sit down because you and I have to talk." So, I explained it. After he hung up the phone, I went in and told him, "Earl, you have to be more circumspect with your phone conversations." I told him why and that he had upset Patrice. He was just mortified. He apologized and everything, but he didn't even think about how that could be taken out of context.

You have to be careful who you are around and the language that you use. I wouldn't refer to a male dog if I'm talking to dog people. That will put you in the greenhorn section right away. I mean, a dog is a dog and a bitch is a bitch. It took us awhile to get comfortable with some of the terminology. It was always interesting when you sat around a whole group, and listened objectively to how they were talking and what they were talking about, like breeding problems and all of that kind of stuff. It is a whole new life and a whole new world. We really enjoyed it and we still enjoy it.

After we retired, we found out that where we had been a little bit lazy in our younger days, we are a whole lot lazier now. The idea of bathing and grooming two or three dogs and getting up at the crack of dawn to drive to Georgia for show a dog, well, good heavens, we haven't had our third cup of coffee yet or read the newspaper. We have slowed down a lot. As I said, I wouldn't

Jock.

Gwen: There was the fellow that I told you about who was a professional handler on the weekends. On Monday mornings, he would get a certain number of calls at work from people who wanted to know about the dogs and how their dog did at the shows.

One of the breeds that he showed was Pugs; and, of course, Pugs come in different colors. Earl would get into the dog "lingo" when he was on the phone. I had a black girl working for me, and she was a wonderful worker; she was the answer to a prayer. Our offices were laid out so that there were five or six in a row and we had closed corridor doors. She was walking through Earl's office one day when she heard him on the phone. She came into my office almost in tears. I said, "Patrice, what's wrong?" And she said, "I made Mr. Overstreet mad, and I don't know what I did." I said, "Why?" She said, "I don't know, but mind if we do get a dog or a bitch. I prefer bitches so it depends on what becomes available when we are looking. If it becomes a show potential, we wouldn't object to showing it locally or wherever we are and continuing on a limited basis. To say that we would ever get into breeding again, we would have to have a top-notch bitch, and she would have to promise us not to have more than five puppies. (laughter)

So, how have dogs affected your lifestyle?

Gwen: We planned our vacations around dog shows and show circuits. We would say, "Hey, I've never been here, so let's look at the calendar. Yes, there are dogs shows there, so let's go." They have really carried us to a lot of places, including Bermuda, that we would probably have not gone to otherwise. We have never been back to Bermuda, but we certainly enjoyed it while we were there.

They also give you insight. When I read in the newspaper about dog legislation, I can really get uptight about that. Just because one Rottweiler has bitten a child pretty badly, now we have to come forth with a law to make all Rottweilers illegal or something like that. No, you can't do that. You have to consider a vicious dog, not a vicious breed. There are so many people who are making these laws; they are based on public uproar at the time. If you jumped up with a flag and said, "I'm sorry that your dog tried to eat that child, however..." Then you are a bad guy because you are after the victim instead of the villain.

I have also noticed that when you have a large dog, that large dog has instant level eye contact with a small child. And if that dog has established itself, in your lifestyle, into a pecking order and they look up and see a small child on the same level coming in, it is a threat to them. You as an owner have got to be aware of this. You have got to read that dog's body language. Is that dog tending to hackle a little bit at that child? Is it circling a little bit? Is the tail wagging or not wagging? Any dog that feels threatened on their own home turf may want to get a little bit aggressive about it. If you know that, you can stop it real quick. That is why so many small children do get attacked; because they are on the same eye contact level.

Regarding dog legislation, there have been so many bills that have been passed that are wrong. Simply because one breed happened to attack a person, a jogger or someone; because of careless owners. I am a firm believer in a leash law. Keep your dogs in fences. Maybe this wasn't a problem before, but it is now because our population is greater and we live in more high-density areas. I can remember that as a kid, we had a little white fuzzy mongrel, and we lived at the end of two dead-end streets. Our yard was totally fenced in; but for the kids to get to the grade school, they would shortcut through our yard. My dad and mom didn't mind, unless they tried to steal the pears or figs off of the trees. If they came through walking, our family dog had no objection, but if a child came through running, this dog got very agitated. She would chase the child and maybe nip it on the back of the leg. Rarely did she ever break the skin, but there was something about running that upset her so we had to watch her. We always would caution the kids not to run through the yard. They could always stop and pet the dog and that was fine; she didn't care about that.

You can find as many aggressive mixed-breed dogs, I think, as you can find aggressive purebred dogs. The purebred dogs may be tied to a tree or kenneled in a small space, and there is nothing more ferocious than a dog on the other side of the fence. They are going to fencefight regardless. We were visiting one time, and there was a fence and the neighbors would tell us to watch these dogs. The dogs would try to eat each other up through that fence. The fence was merely a boundary line, not a total fence, and they would run to the far end where it ended. Then they would clear the end of the fence, look at each other, and then come back. They didn't want to fight, but the fence gave them the encouragement to do that.

Our dogs were not fencefighters. They might want to lick you to death, but that would be your biggest damage from them.

I think a lot of dog laws have been passed that never should have been passed. For about eight years, I was president of the Virginia Federation of Dog Clubs and Breeders. This was made up of delegates from all breed and breed-specific clubs in the state of Virginia. When some of the legislation was going to come up in Richmond, we eventually established a committee that would go down and lobby various people.

Now, after about fifteen years, there are actually legislators there who will contact our group to talk about different laws that are coming up. If they are good laws, there is a telephone committee that starts sending out messages all over the state to please support the congressman or senator in that particular law. Sometimes, a particular law is a bad law but it is tacked onto another law and if the one is passed, then the other one will go through too.

I recall at one point we had a legislator from northern Virginia that was going to sponsor one of our bills. So we went out and had a thousand bumper stickers printed up stating that the Virginia Federation of Dog Clubs and Breeders supported her. Everyone on the committee had one on their car even though they weren't in her district. We carried a whole bunch of them up to her so that she could have them to pass out to the people in her district. There are a few other states that have this type of response team. Every state should have them; every state should be aware of what is happening in their local area as far as dogs are concerned. We tried for a long time, and never really gave up on the issue of not allowing dogs to ride free in the back of a pickup truck. There is no law. If people can ride free in the back of a pickup truck, how can you enforce a law for dogs not to ride free in the back of the pickup truck? Somewhere, recently, I read that one state has made it illegal for people to ride free in the back of a pickup truck.

So, what have been the benefits and the drawbacks of being in dogs?

Gwen: Drawbacks? It has cost us a lot of money.

Art: Yes, that's true. (laughter)

Gwen: It meant that we had to get an extra long Dodge van so we could carry the dogs. It meant that we had to get an extra big trailer so we could be free-standing for four or five days on a show spot. We tried at various times to keep records of everything we spent. Any income that we earned, we had to try to declare it as a small business.

One year, we thought we had made it. We had two litters and sold the puppies, and we had done some boarding. We never advertised about boarding but whenever we sold a puppy we said we would be more than willing, because that gave us a chance to see these dogs later on. We felt that was the year when we could actually say that we were a small business. We missed it by about $15! We still couldn't do it, so I told Art, "This is ridiculous. We aren't going to even try it anymore." So that was the end of the business part of it. Now, I think that the only way that you can really make money is if you can have a boarding kennel and board every dog that comes down the road. Maybe then you can come up with a self-supporting business that will keep you going. There is an old saying that "There is a whole lot of money in the dog business because I put most of it there." Do we begrudge that? No. We have had enough other things that supplemented that: the social life, the people that we met, the places that we have gone. Certainly we don't regret that. If anything, we gained a lot.

Art: Yes, I agree.

Gwen: It broadened our circle of friends. We learned a lot from the dogs as far as patience and stoicism. The first Shih Tzu that we bought was from a lady who had what probably was an old-fashioned puppy mill. We were looking at this little tiny Shih Tzu that she was willing to sell. That was back when there weren't very many of them, and the breeder wanted them in show homes. But that one wasn't going to develop to be very big. She was going to stay small, so the lady was willing to sell her as a pet. While we were standing there, I happened to look down and saw that the dog, who was eleven months old, had gotten her foot stuck under the fence. She was trying her best to get away and couldn't. Yet that dog never made a noise of panic or hurt. She was just trying to solve that problem herself. We found that in almost every dog we had, how stoic they were. They have a really high tolerance for pain. The only dog that was an exception to that rule was a Shih Tzu who was whelping puppies. I have never heard a dog scream, that sounded so much like a woman, as that bitch did. It drove my children out of the house. They just couldn't stand it. She was in absolute pain but, as soon as that puppy was born, she was right there; an absolute, A-number-one mother. She was the only dog that I have ever known that complained of discomfort or hurt.

So it has all been worth it?

Gwen: Yes, it has.

Art: Yes. It has been good over the years.

Is there anything that we haven't covered? Any soap boxes?

Gwen: Not really. I think that the breed has come such a long way in the last 25 or 26 years. You can see so much more consistency in the breed. You can now afford to stand back and be picky about pigment or something like that; whereas before you were just grateful to see a Bernese Mountain Dog. As I said, there are a lot more dogs. The breeding has become a lot more intelligent, with the people and the way they go about it. They are still conservative and I think that is good.

Art: Most people that are in the breed from top to bottom are willing to share their experiences with others. It is really a good feeling when you are around the different people. There are always a few who have some secret and won't tell it, but they are few and far between. It has been a good experience.

Gwen: We have profited a lot from the people. It's funny, when you are at a dog show and you are talking dogs, you don't care if this person has a penny in their pocket, or not. It is totally irrelevant. Your interest is focused on one point. And the first thing that you know, your interest expands a little bit. You aren't impressed by the bank rolls or whatever.

There are exceptions; we went to a specialty in Pennsylvania and one of the judges had agreed to come over to a little building where we had gathered. We had quite a group there, and we used to do a lot of "tailgating" because that encouraged other people to come. The judge had been over to Switzerland, and he had been commissioned by someone, he couldn't tell us who, to go over and buy some Bernese Mountain Dogs. He was going to show us the movies he had taken and the different kennels. Most of the people in Switzerland don't have kennels. They have kitchens, or they have a shed in the backyard. Rarely do you see a kennel situation. We later found out that the client was a famous actor and his wife. She had seen the dogs somewhere and commissioned him to go over there, and he had come back with one male and four or five females. They had one or two in New York where they had a big apartment. Someone asked us if we were thrilled to have a celebrity own some dogs of our breed. I said, "No, what will thrill me is what they do for the breed now that they have them." Somebody with that fame can really aid or hurt the breed a great deal. A few months later, someone was in New Jersey and saw the wife at ringside. She was all aflutter and had four or five friends with her, and she kept asking which one was her dog. They had to point out which one was her dog. How deflating that was! I believe that a temperament problem developed eventually, and they never went beyond that. A couple of people contacted them about breeding because they had all-Swiss dogs. As far as I know, they never bred and rarely ever returned calls of people who were curious. Obviously, they didn't know if the people were curious about the dogs or curious about them. That is the only time that I know of when a celebrity created a furor in the breed.

Thank you very much. I certainly appreciated our talk. •

Bernese Mountain Dog People

The Bernese Mountain Dog Annual
Talks with
Denise Dean
DEER PARK
Parks, Arizona

This interview was conducted at the home of Denise in January 2004 by Lynne Robertson.

When did you get started with the Bernese, and why did you choose this breed?

I got my first purebred dog, thinking of showing, in 1975. That was an Old English Sheepdog. I started going to the dog shows with her, and I decided I didn't want a second breed that takes the care that they do. I saw some Bernese at a show in Tucson, and we got our first Bernese in 1978. I liked the idea of getting into a breed where you can make some impact, because it was fairly rare. I liked the size, the lack of coat care, their personalities, and the basic, overall look of the dog.

Who was your foundation stock?

I got my first Bernese from a breeder in Las Vegas, Diane Russ, Buttonwillow kennel, who is the author of *The Beautiful Bernese Mountain Dog*. That is why we are in that book so much. That dog's name was Ch. Deer Park Iner v Buttonwillow. Everything I have is related to her. She only had a few litters and very few puppies; she had a total of ten puppies in her lifetime, but everything came down from them.

Would you say that was sheer luck?

She was actually a really good one to start with. I had done some research – I had been in the Old English long enough to have a pretty good idea of what I wanted in a breeder. (I waited almost two years to get my first one.) Actually, Patrick, my other half, kept saying, "Buy one!" I was like, "No, no; this is the breeder I want," so I waited until she had a puppy. Iner was the only female in the litter, so it was definitely luck on that.

What was it about her kennel that you admired?

I really liked her attitude about breeding dogs, and the fact that they were totally housedogs. I liked what they looked like. They had some of the basic foundation, and back then, the breed was very rare, there were not many at all. Diana's dogs went back to Sylvia Howison's Sablemate kennel in Michigan. She bred the mother of my dogs, and that is where Diana got her dog from, so I basically got her lines. I just liked the look of them and liked working with her.

Did you do linebreeding over the years, outcrossing or inbreeding?

A little of all. You have to bring in outside stuff to get started, but my line on the whole was pretty heavily linebred. We have done outcrosses here and there, but we do have a tight-knit group at this point. One of the big winners was a dog from Colorado that won the National three times. His name was Ch. Ashley v Bernerliebe, who belonged to Christina Ohlsen, from Rye, Colorado, she is still involved with the breed. He won the National three times, and I actually got to handle him to two of those wins. For his time, he was way ahead of the breed. He would still be competitive today. He was a spectacular dog. So we bred Iner's daughter to him, and everything I have had in big winners came down from that breeding.

How many litters have you had over the years?

I've been a pretty active breeder. I never have actually sat down and counted litters I have had. We don't have as many now, but most of the time a couple of litters a year. I would guess, just off the top of my head, 40 or 50 litters. That's over 27 years. We have produced over 100 champions, and probably 90 percent of those I showed myself. I don't sell to show homes, per se. I want them in a family home where they are going to be totally part of the family. Then if somebody wants to show, great! But most of the ones that are shown, I show because they are with families who don't want to show. It has been a little different than a lot of people. I have not really had many outside people showing our dogs. It has always been us.

So it sounds like you keep strings on the show potentials.

Well, I'm a little different from breeders in that if I have a puppy that I think is good enough to be shown, I basically put it in a pet home that is close enough locally that I can deal with. Then the people have their pet, and I deal with all the figuring out of when it is bred, when it is shown and those kinds of things. They have a dog they love, and if it turns out great, we show it. If not, oh, well, they still have a dog they love. So we don't get the dog in a situation where somebody doesn't want it because for some reason it didn't turn out, i.e., their teeth are crooked or something.

I am really a firm believer that most breeds, and this breed especially, should not change homes. I REALLY don't like the rescue thing, I really don't like dogs moving

Denise Dean and Hank. Photo by Patrick G. Hatch.

around. I think the rescue situation on the whole hurts a lot of dogs because when people know they have that option, they are much more willing to give up the dog than if they knew they would have to place it themselves and figure out what to do with it. When my puppy people call wanting to place a dog, I do everything I can to talk them out of not placing the dog as opposed to helping them find a home. I am totally opposed to that; unless there is no choice, in which case I will help find the dog a home.

With this breed, when they change homes as adults, they are always kind of nervous and neurotic, insecure dogs. They are never really happy dogs. They are fine, everybody loves them because they are so clingy, they are so attached, but they are never stable like a dog that has been someplace since it was a puppy. When people want to call and say they have to get rid of a dog because they are moving, I ask, "What do you do with your kids? You gonna get rid of them, too? Otherwise, don't move!" I really feel that dogs – especially the Working dogs, although there are some breeds, probably most of the hounds, and breeds like that which don't really form a strong bond with their owners – probably do fine changing and moving because they are much more interested in a pack than they are the people. With this breed, their whole life is devoted to their owners. They would jump off a cliff for you if you asked them to. (laughter) That is why I don't think they change homes as well.

Did you have one litter you considered your best?

In this breed, we have a lot of strange health problems and issues. I also breed Portuguese Water Dogs, and that breed, if you breed two nice ones together, you get really nice puppies. In this breed, you can breed two nice ones together and get something that looks like some other breed. I don't think I would say that I have ever had an outstanding litter, per se. I have certainly had one that produced good puppies. We had one particular female that produced fabulous puppies no matter who she was bred to. That probably counts for more than a particular litter that stands out. Her name is Ch. Deer Park Ferkin v Buttonwillow, and she is again, one that I got from Diane Russ. She was related to Iner but with a little more outside blood to her. Then I bred her back into my line, and she is in the Top Ten all-time producing bitches. She was bred to my dog that did all the winning, Ch. Deer Park Heartlight, who we called Sparky. He won the National, and he was the number one male in the country in 1988 and 1989. He is the one I mentioned in the top two or three all-time top producers in the breed.

Anyway, she was bred to him and produced a number of champions, I believe thirteen or fourteen champions out of her litters. She was bred to him, and she was bred to a couple of other dogs, and she was a really good producer. The Bernese club doesn't have a Register of Merit or anything like that; they just have a listing of the top producers (any female Bernese that has produced over six champion puppies) that goes in the yearbook and she is in the top few. She was the best female, as far as that goes, and that was actually when we were more active in showing. Now that I'm judging, I'm not showing nearly as much. I show some, but we are not finishing a lot of dogs at this point. There's only so much time! (laughter)

So your top winning producer was Deer Park Heartlight; what about from there?

He had a son and a grandson that did pretty well, but he is really the only one I ever had that did very well. He was never actually campaigned, but I went out and showed him enough to get him in the top ratings. He was the top male Bernese; there was a female that was the top Bernese, but he was the top male. Like I said, he won the National in 1988, one of the biggest ones they have had in Vermont. He was always owner/handled; I showed him totally myself. He was a pretty exciting dog.

Were those owner wins more exciting?

By far! If you talk to anybody who truly breeds, they are by far the most important ones, or the ones that really mean something, as opposed to Best in Show. The year he won Best of Breed at the National, his daughter also went Best in Sweeps, with me showing her, so it was an unbelievable weekend. That is something I can never repeat in my life, I'm sure. That's a once-in-a-lifetime deal. It has been downhill since then! (laughter)

When you were in the ring, were you flabbergasted or did you have an inkling beforehand?

Well, I knew the dog was really competitive and the particular judge we had I had shown under before, and knew it was her style of dog. The dog that actually pushed him the hardest was the female that went Best of Opposite. She is absolutely spectacular. She has been in a lot of books; she was a pretty famous dog. I wouldn't have had any problem if she had gone Breed and I'd gone Opposite to her, because she is just spectacular. She was really the one that pushed him the most.

When you go into a National, you never think you will get down to the end. But when you get down to the end, of course, you get really excited. When you go into a National, you never think, "Oh I'm going to win this thing!" I can't imagine; there are too many things at play. You never know how dogs are going to show, and remember this was a 300-plus dog entry. At that time, it was the biggest one they had. Since then, of course they have gotten a lot bigger than that. I was lucky enough to be able to show a dog three times at the National, twice with Ashley, who I didn't own, and then once with my own dog. Those are fun! Actually, Ashley went in thinking he would win much more than I did. Ashley was such a different caliber of dog than most of what the breed had at that time. Whereas by the time Sparky was being shown, we had some consistently better dogs. It was a lot more competitive.

So you do feel the quality has changed in the Bernese?

What has happened with Bernese, in the very beginning the breed was not very good. Then it got to the point where we had some fabulous, outstanding dogs, probably all would have been National Specialty winners through the '80s. But in the ring we had really good dogs and really BAD dogs. Dogs that the judges wondered how they went to the food dish. Now they have gotten to the point where they are all kind of in the middle. We have none of the outstanding dogs at this point, and we don't have the horrible ones.

Am/Can Ch. Deer Park Heartlight, Group Second, Idaho Capitol City KC, 1986.

So most people will say, "Oh, the breed looks better," well, yes, but we are really missing that top end at this point. We have a real problem.

What faults or problems do you see now?

We used to have dogs that were fabulous movers, but not very pretty in type. Then we had some that were gorgeous in type that could hardly move at all. Now we have all the ones in the middle that are okay in type, okay in movement, but they really don't excel in either extreme at all. Our biggest single problem, and I think it is in most Working breeds, is front ends and shoulders. We have lost our shoulders totally. With that, we have totally lost the outline and the pretty look. This breed used to be a beautiful dog, and now they are kind of a sporty little stumpy-looking thing that is not pretty anymore. We have lost that.

In the breeds I judge, by far, the Bernese are in the worst shape. People complain about the judging, but anytime you are judging mediocre dogs, it's anybody's choice because you might dislike this one more than that one. If there is a really good dog there, the judge is supposed to be able to find it. The judging is pretty good; it's just that they don't have a good dog to find. If you have five dogs that are all sort of so-so, and a different dog goes up each day, the judge may never be right or wrong because it depended on who showed the best or what little nuance you think is not as bad as the others. We really have some problems in that direction.

What has happened to our front ends is many new people have never seen a really good front. What happens is, when you get this big, heavy dog, and it has the kind of reach and drive they should have, they don't come and go as cleanly as a shorter-strided dog. So people kept breeding for shorter and shorter strides, and now the legs come at you straight. They only move five or six inches;

Ch. Deer Park O'Hezzamazing. Photo by Patrick G. Hatch.

it's really easy to get that kind of stride coming straight. I run into novices all the time who say, "Oh, look at the front on that dog," when I am thinking, "It is a horrible front!" It may have straight legs, but it doesn't have good shoulders, it doesn't have any reach.

If you talk to one of my favorite people, Pat Trotter, she says that is what is happening to all breeds. She thinks the two reasons that the front ends are going is it is easier to get the shorter-strided dogs to come at you cleanly, and it's much easier to get good muscle on a shorter-strided dog. A longer-strided dog has to have a lot more exercise to be in shape and to move properly. She thinks those are the two things that are happening in all breeds, and she

Ch. Deer Park O'Hezzamazing. Photo by Patrick G. Hatch.

might be right. The first is true in our breed, I know, but I never thought about the second until recently and I was talking to her. It is really true. Part of losing that shoulder is you lose the neck and the whole topline. This breed used to have a nice neck and a nice flowing topline, but they don't any more.

Is this breeding for the incorrect form intentional, or due to ignorance?

Ignorance, without a doubt! It is totally out of ignorance. Most of the people breeding this breed are novices. We really don't have more than maybe five people in the country who have bred for more than ten years. The old-timers don't breed any more. The vast majority are brand-new and they listen to anybody who wins! If you have a whole group of those, they will win. So yes, I think it is a matter of them not knowing, I don't think they are purposely doing it. It wins. I told you about the dog that sired 1,000 puppies; he is a top-producing dog, and that is exactly the same kind of a thing. All the breeds are getting into trouble when they have a certain stud dog that everybody uses. Nobody's perfect; there is just no dog that is good enough to use that much in any breed. When that starts happening, you start losing that and they are winning, so they think that is what they are supposed to look like.

What I am saying is the judges don't have any choice in the matter. When you get one that doesn't look like the norm, it looks so odd that a lot of the people think it's wrong, because it is just the odd man out. In my judging, time after time I will put up a dog, and the people say, "Oh, I never noticed that dog!" It is because it is so different-looking. It has some of the features that we haven't totally lost yet. There are still a few out there, but not many! If anybody would ever go and look at the old pictures, or look at the logo that the national club still has, it looks nothing like the dogs in the ring today. As far as outline, that is. It is not there.

If you had to pick a couple of ideal dogs, or close to the ideal, what would they be like?

A dog that was in the Midwest, Ch. Broken Oaks Dieter Arjana, who went Winners at the National under Mrs. Freeman (a famous Rottweiler breeder, now passed away). He went BOB at the National a few years later. He was an absolutely spectacular dog. Beautiful moving, gorgeous looking, enough size and bone. He is one of the prettiest dogs the breed has had. Certainly today he would be a huge asset if we had him around. I really can't think of any dog in the last ten years that I'm really excited about. There are a few around who are being shown that are doing better, and are looking quite nice, but I don't think there is another dog to compare. Another dog from way back was a dog named Davos from New York, who also presented a really nice picture.

There is one I just thought of who is fairly current, he is nine years old, a Canadian dog, they call him Cody. He is an absolutely beautiful picture; he is exactly what we want the breed to look like. That's probably the most current dog. He won the National three or four years ago. He is currently one of the better ones we have had in quite a while. Some of the Canadian dogs are much nicer. Canadians have not lost the whole picture. There are several breeders in Canada who are producing really nice, spectacular dogs, and they have done a lot of winning at our Nationals throughout the years. There is Eve Menagoz and her kennel name is Sennenhof. She has not bred very much, but she has beautiful dogs through the years. The one I was thinking of is a fairly new gal to the breed, Mylene Turbide (Spirit Mountain kennel), who is being mentored by Mrs. Newfie (Peggy Helming) from New York. She is doing a really good job. She is a fairly young person who won our National three or four years ago, and has some beautiful dogs and is doing a nice job in Canada. Her dogs can really be an asset. She is probably the newest up-and-coming person who I think has a really good eye, and she is getting some really good advice, because Peggy is a brilliant breeder. I would love to live near her so I could go talk to her myself! (laughter)

Canadians through the years have had a lot of nice dogs. Ron Smith, who is not breeding anymore, had a lot of nice dogs through the years. The Canadian standard is a little different. I don't know if that is why they are paying a little more attention, or probably the biggest reason is that they haven't quite gone to campaigning the dogs to the level we do in America, which I think is one of the biggest problems America has. Dogs in general, not just Bernese Mountain Dogs. That is a whole 'nother story altogether!

Part of the problem in our breed is so many times, the dog that is the big-winning dog – and I think this is true in all breeds, it is not a Bernese thing – is basically a generic show dog. It's not a great specimen of the breed. If you look into most of the top dogs in the country, and just changed their color, they would all be the same. They all move the same, they all show the same, they are all very showy. They all have the same kind of attitude, and that is what makes them a top Group winner and also a Best in Show dog. It is not necessarily correct for the breed at all. A good Bernese is never going to be a non-stop show dog. That is not the kind of personality they should have. If you talk to breeders in almost every breed, almost everyone doesn't like the top dog. It certainly happens in the Bernese, and that may be why the Canadians and others are doing a better job, because very few people are involved in the ratings game, of wanting to be the top dog.

What is the advantage of being a highly ranked dog?

To be perfectly honest, it is all an ego thing. It really is. It is being able to say, "I have the number one dog." Certainly a win at a National says more about a dog than a dog that has 400 Bests in Show. He won against the best of his breed, that really says something about what kind of dog he is. There are a lot of these top dogs going to shows every weekend of the year all over the country. So what?! Give me a dog that can be shown 100 times and wins 95 times, and that would tell me a whole lot more than one that went to 1,000 shows and because of that, was top dog. There are not many campaigned and the ones that are campaigned are number one, two, and three. It doesn't mean anything about the quality of the dog. I mean, they have to be decent, you can't have an awful dog do it, but it is a numbers game. It is a matter of how much you can get out and show the dog.

Would you like to see that changed, then?

I think there has been talk about it. But how you could change it and control it, I don't know. There are people having this idea and that idea and whatever, but it really should be some kind of percentage. If you show at 100 shows, the top dog is the winner 35 times, as opposed to one that is shown 1,000 and wins 35 times. I don't know what would be the best answer, but I really think it is out of hand. It isn't good for the public, it isn't good for the dogs, because these dogs are just pushed. The Canadian dogs tend to be truer to type and more what the breed should be. If you have a really good, true Bernese Mountain Dog, with the heft, and the type and the movement, and the personality that they have – they are never going to be a top campaigned dog unless they are shown by their owner. They just don't have the personality; they won't hold up to it. It is just not their way of going. The only dogs in our breed that have ever done that are dogs that are really not correct for the breed. That's what it takes, a different type of personality, different kind of movement – but as I said, that is not just a Bernese problem; it is certainly true in lots of breeds that are different. Some breeds are automatically that showy and have that kind of personality, they can handle that kind of stress. But there are a lot of breeds where that is not true. Yes, with the Canadians, there are some people who campaign, but they don't have that whole big deal.

You mentioned judging in Canada, is it different than here?

It's a little different. I couldn't quote it to you, but it calls for a little heavier bone than our standard which doesn't really address that. A few nuances, but basically it is no different. It is just a little different in its tone and what it looks for. That may be part of it. More than anything it is just what the people are after. To have a number one dog in Canada, you only need to go to a handful of shows. There are not that many people campaigning, certainly not in this breed. It's a different kind of attitude.

How do you feel about our Bernese standard?

I have always thought the Bernese standard is very good. Certainly, in any standard, there are some things you could probably elaborate on but I feel it is a basic standard. If people would breed to the standard, we wouldn't be in the trouble we're in. People say, "Well, the judges did this," but judges only judge what you bring them. If you have nothing from which to choose that fits the standard, very few judges will withhold all the time. It doesn't make you a very popular judge! (laughter) If breeders would actually read that standard more and breed for what the standard asks for, we would be in much better shape.

Have you done any judging overseas?

I've only been to England. England has a really big variety of dogs, and the good ones were very good and could have certainly been competitive here as good as anything we have in this country. They have a lot of dogs that tend to be what I call "parlor dogs." They are really cute, but they don't look like a Working dog. They are shorter, fluffier, darling, cute little dogs. They have a lot of that, and that is really popular in England in this breed. Compared to some of the things we have, I still think they are better off – at least they are cute! (laughter)

They have some really good dogs, too. They just had a bigger variety – there are a lot of those little fluffy dogs, and their number one dog has been one for the last several years. They are a shorter, more compact dog, shorter-legged dog, and they have very long hair, which makes them look even shorter. They are really pretty little fluffy things, but they just don't look very much like a Working dog. The good ones – we went and watched a specialty, and then I just judged a small show – the ones they had there, that were really high quality, were fabulous. They certainly would be competitive here. I don't know if it is just my opinion, but the working type tend to win over there under the foreign judges, the little fluffy ones win under the English judges. That is how it goes; we all have our viewpoint. I am a "form follows function" person, and to me, if a dog doesn't look like it can do its job, then it is incorrect.

Do you follow that philosophy when you are breeding?

I certainly try! In most breeds, although not all breeds, but especially in Bernese Mountain Dogs, the two are intertwined. If you have correct structure and the correct angulation and those things, that is all part of the picture of their type. I don't think you can separate the two. There are certainly breeds that you can. If you are talking about Portuguese Water Dogs, the other breed I am in, they are in fabulous shape. They are wonderful dogs, they are very sound and very typey, but you certainly could separate them because what they do for a living, what their original purpose was, had nothing to do with how they could trot. So you can take a dog that is super-typey that is not a very good mover, and still think it is a very good quality dog. When you are talking about a working dog like a Bernese, that worked totally as a farm dog, they had to be able to move structurally or they are were going to have a problem. So the two things are intertwined in this breed, but I don't think that is always true. It depends on the breed and what they were bred for.

Which traits are the most difficult to breed for, and which are the easiest?

I would certainly agree with the experts in breeding who say shoulders and front ends are by far the hardest thing to breed in and to keep. We used to have fabulous front ends, and we don't at this point. It is a very hard thing to hang onto. Certainly the easiest, as far as conforma-

Photo by Patrick G. Hatch.

tion traits, the heads and rears are the easiest. You can correct things in a generation on heads and certainly with rears.

The big problem with breeding this breed is our health issues. If you look at true statistics, we are probably losing 50 percent of them to a genetic cancer, malignant histiocytosis. Only Bernese and Flat Coats have the problem. It is definitely genetic. UC-Davis did a ten-year study helped with funding by the Bernese Mountain Dog club, but it is what they call a polygenic gene which is like a hip gene, where it is a whole bunch of stuff. We really don't have a handle on it. So anytime you are breeding this breed, that has to go in your mix, and that makes it much more harder on the selection. You may see a dog that is gorgeous, but has a parent, grandparent and great-grandparent that died of it. It has to be part of your mix, because to me, I don't care how beautiful they are, if they are not going to live and be healthy and their temperaments aren't good, it doesn't matter much. Those are the traits that are so hard.

Conformation traits are fairly easy, because you can see what you have. Those you don't know at all; they are hiding. It's real tough; that is probably why we don't have many long-term breeders. They just have them for a while and they get so distraught and upset about it that it is the end for them and they get out of it. Almost everybody I know who doesn't breed, that is why. It's so depressing. There's no way to select for it. By the time my dog is old enough to have it, they are way past the breeding stage. It doesn't present itself at all; once they have symptoms, they are dead. They are only alive a few weeks once they are sick. You have no warning. It's a big problem, and I tell people when they call and are interested in breeding a Bernese Mountain Dog, "Be aware, this is what is going on. Are you willing to have this breed for only six to eight years?" If you are, they are the most wonderful dog in the world and you have to figure that is what you are going to get. If you happen to be lucky enough to get one that grows old, great! I have some that were thirteen. But you have to face that if you want a Bernese Mountain Dog. At least on the good side, it is not a disease where they are not healthy. They are fine, and then they are dead. It's not a lingering thing, so at least that's a positive thought. It's a horrible problem, and I think that is what has stopped many long-term breeders.

Do you feel you have a distinguishable line?

Yes, I think I have it. I don't know if it is good or bad, though. (laughter) I was just in Michigan judging and was at a get-together with a lot of the Bernese people, including Sylvia Howison, who has been in the breed forever. She was a judge, but she is now elderly and is going blind so doesn't judge anymore. But she introduced me (this was a group of all fairly novice people), "This is Denise Dean and she's well-known; she has a line of Bernese Mountain Dogs." I was thinking, "Well, thank you, Sylvia!" (laughter) But I guess I do, although these are not the best of times. We still have a nice outline and bone. My dogs tend to have a little curlier coat than all of us would like. Hopefully my movement is pretty consistent. I don't show bad-moving dogs. If their structure is decent, and the overall outline is good ... I have had judges tell me, "Yours look like an old-style Bernese," thank heaven, I don't want to lose that! (laughter) They may say these dogs remind them of dogs they saw ten years ago, and that is probably the biggest compliment. If I ever got where I could select for straighter coats, I would, but I haven't gotten that far. (laughter)

What is your long-range goal in breeding the Bernese?

To try to come up with some that don't have this darn cancer. I do tons of research and selection trying. I can't say I have made much headway, but I try.

Do you think the numbers without cancer have improved?

No, it may be worse. I have a good friend in the national club, and he says, "You wouldn't believe what I hear!" A lot of people are not being honest about it. You hear people all the time saying, "Oh, my dogs don't have cancer." Well, they are lying. You don't get 50 percent of the breed with it when everybody isn't affected. I would love to say I have a handle on it, but I don't.

Do you think most breeders are ethical?

Again, I think most people are trying the best they can, but there are a lot of people who just aren't very knowledgeable. For some reason, they don't go to the trouble to become knowledgeable. The cancer thing is such a horrible problem that a lot of people try to ignore it and not pay attention. They are probably doing as good as I am, so maybe they aren't doing any harm anyway. We all have a problem, but at least I tell people when they are looking for a puppy, ask the person what the dogs in their pedigrees say, three generations back, died of. Ask how long they lived, and their aunts and uncles. If they know that stuff – even if they all died young, that is who you are going to want to talk to. The people who care and are looking. If you find somebody who says, "Oh, I know but I have never had any problems," they are just lying. The ones who know and can tell you yes, this is what I did here, this is what I'm trying – that's all you can ask is to try and improve. Nobody has a handle on it; it's a horrible problem.

Did you have a mentor or someone who influenced your breeding a lot?

In the very beginning, the gal I got my first dog from, Diane Russ. She is not involved with breeding now. She certainly gave us a start, but actually most of my mentoring comes from other breeds. Sylvia Howison has been influential. There have been people who have, but most of my dog knowledge comes from other breeds.

Do you enjoy judging, and how did that evolve?

I have been a dog groomer for 30-some years. Handling that many dogs, feeling them and seeing what they are like, looking at temperaments, looking what coat can do, those kinds of things gives you a lot of insight into dogs period. I applied for judging at an age most people would consider pretty young. It is such a long, uphill battle, it takes some time to get anywhere. So I decided to get started while I was still showing dogs, but really more than anything, it was so I could help influence the judging. You can do so much more teaching from inside the rings than you can as an exhibitor. You see people, you talk to them all the time, and you run into people who are breeding your breed and ask what they think of this or that. I think you can make headway and have more influence by being a judge and getting to meet those people. They are judges, they are always interested in learning about the breed. I'm sure there are some who aren't but there are a lot who are interested. That is one of the biggest reasons why I started judging when I did, so I could get more influence.

I do judge's education quite a bit, and certainly coming from another judge's perspective, you have a much better view on what they want to learn, and what to teach them, as opposed to someone who has never judged. It is a very different perspective judging than it is ringside. It can be very different once you are in the ring. You can help teach a lot better once you've been in there because you go to the seminars, and it may be someone who is very knowledgeable in the breed, but has never judged. The topics they cover have no relevance to what you want to know. You want to ask the same things you're asking now: what are the problems in the breed, what are the strengths, what do you want to do as an outsider or a person coming into a breed – those are things you want to know. Anybody can read the standard, anybody can be taught what they want, but you really need to learn the nuances of the breed.

How long have you been judging?

Not very long, six or seven years. I have twelve breeds at this point, two Working and ten Herding. I am working on going to the Herding Group because I'm still actively in Bernese, and I don't want to judge a Group I'm actively showing. I figure by the time I judge the whole Herding Group and then the whole Working Group, I'll be 90 and I'll be happy to quit showing Bernese. (laughter)

How many shows do you judge every year?

Being a new judge, you'll find it really goes way up and down. When you get a set of new breeds, everybody hires you for that. Like this year, I think I have twelve assignments. Last year I only did three, because I was waiting for new breeds. So until you get a lot further along, you don't have kind of an average. People see you in publications for new breeds, and then they hire you which is two years out, because it takes most clubs two years out, then you have a whole bunch, and you are ready to get your next. You'll have a couple of years where you don't have much, and then you get a bunch. My next application I am going to apply for the rest of the Herding Group. Once you can do a Group, then you are a much more hirable person and it gets to be a little more even sailing.

What do you look for when a dog first enters your ring?

Like I said, I am first and foremost an overall picture and outline person. I want the breed to look like the breed. I really agree with the expert, Annie Clark who has always said, "If you see a dog in silhouette, you should be able to tell what breed it is. Not being able to see what color it is or anything else." That is what is gone in Bernese Mountain Dogs; they have no silhouette. You could draw one and every person would guess a different breed. That is what is gone, that overall picture. When you see that, it is what makes the dog look like it.

We are kind of somewhere between a Newf and a Golden, as far as our outline. A Newf is really extreme on their head and outline, and a Golden is much less. So that is my first look, looking for that dog that presents the picture of what the breed should look like. Anybody who judges has to have a picture of what the perfect dog is stuck in their brain. It makes judging much easier. Anyone can say, "Pick this one or that one because this one doesn't move quite as well or that one has the wrong tail," but it is an overall picture that makes the breed look like the breed. That is what you look for first, that is what you look for on the move, a dog that will carry itself still in that same silhouette.

Are there any standards that are particularly good or poor in your experience?

Well, my original breed, Old English Sheepdogs, is about the most vague, funny standard you ever want to see. The height is 22 inches upward. Okay, what does that mean? The Old English standard is so vague it could be anything. If you didn't have someone tell you this is an Old English Sheepdog, you could make it fit all sorts of pictures. It's an old breed; people pretty well know what they are, so the judging is pretty good anyway And a 22-inch dog would not be competitive today; none of them are that little. Not even in the ballpark! (laughter)

Are the Bernese getting bigger or smaller these days?

They go through trends. You will see for a while where they were bigger, and then for a while a lot of judges complained that they were small, with short legs. Right now we have little short-legged dogs and some really tall dogs, both extremes. We go for a while when everybody gets bigger and more massive, to get to the point where they can't move, and then they go back down. It kind of goes through phases, but as far as the size, the breed is pretty decent. I don't think we have too many problems with that.

Do you think there should be any disqualifications?

No, I don't really like a lot of disqualifications because to me, it is fault judging. I was once doing a judging seminar at the National and one of the judges who was attending asked, "What fault could you never forgive in this breed?" I said, "Well, to me, that is totally going about it wrong, because you are looking for something that is bad." We had another mentor who said, "I can't look past light eyes." So I said, "In this scenario, you have the best Bernese you have ever seen, it has perfect structure, gorgeous outline, the right coat, everything, but it has glaringly light eyes. You mean to tell me you would throw it out?"

Certainly there are disqualifications in certain breeds. Ours is a brown coat, or a blue eye, they are a recessive and certainly that's fine. It doesn't look like a Bernese at all, and it shouldn't be in the Breed ring. But you never know, if it wasn't in there as a disqualification, somebody might try to show one. It is those kinds of things that should be disqualified, but in general, some breeds can go overboard on their disqualifications. It is just like fault judging; look for the positives not negatives. The best dog may have the most noticeable fault. But if you look at it from the standpoint of what you cannot forgive, and a dog is perfect in all other factors, you should be able to look past it when it comes to breeding or judging. The whole picture is a much harder thing to breed.

Do you consider what the Bernese was originally bred for when you judge?

Oh, certainly! That is part of what I was talking about when I mentioned these very fluffy, pretty little dogs. They don't look like they could do the job. First of all, that coat – they would die in the heat, because it gets very hot in Switzerland. People may not realize that, but it is hot and humid in the summer. Or they would freeze in the snow. You get these huge, heavy dogs and once around the ring they are panting. If they were on a farm situation, they would never do the job. So certainly in any judging, of any breed, that should be first and foremost in your mind, whether they can do what they were bred to do. This was a gentle farm dog; they were used for drafting, pulling carts, and they were also used to protect things, take care of things and do a little herding. A farm dog has to be athletic and able to carry on all day doing these things.

Have you or would you withhold ribbons if the quality was lacking?

Oh, I have, yes. I am tempted a lot more than I do! (laughter) I believe more judges should do that, because there are a lot of dogs out there with championships that are absolutely appalling and should never be a champion. It happens they were someplace and they were the best of a whole bunch of bad dogs. Very few are willing to withhold. I have had a couple of times where I have withheld and had people write me a note and say, "Thank you so much for doing this, because we were showing this dog and never getting anywhere, but no one would ever say anything." Then they realized they were wasting their time and money. There are also the ones who are just furious, you know. (laughter)

As a judge's point of view, do professional handlers have an advantage?

I would rather have professional handlers in my ring, because as an exhibitor and as a judge, they do the best to present the dog. In this breed, we have all these owners who just do such a bad job – you have to work at being able to see the quality of the dog. It is not that it's a bad dog; sometimes they're the best dog in there. But they just ruin them! I really don't think judges particularly put up handlers because it is a handler. They put up handlers because they do a better at presenting the dog, and they do their homework! I have a couple of breeds that I judge where the handlers are starting to get an idea of what I want, which is what you hope for, so that is what they bring me! So they win a lot more. It has nothing to do with the fact that I think the handler is a better handler or I like them better. You get these novice people who tend to think, "Oh, they are always putting up that handler," well, if they pay attention, they would realize the style of dog that I tend to always put up, and they have done their homework. That is the biggest reason handlers win more, not because they are a handler. It is because they are professional; they do a job, they know what they are doing.

But I'll tell you, and most professional handlers can tell you, nobody can beat a really good owner/handler with their own dog. They have a rapport and something that a handler can never get going. But you still have to do your homework, you still have to have the dog in condition, and so on. While I was campaigning, I found that if you are good and you have a dog that is competitive and in condition, you can beat handlers every time. But most owner/handlers don't present their dogs right, they're not conditioned, their grooming isn't right, the dogs are fat or skinny, not muscled – all of those things are part of the picture. Handlers as a whole do a better job.

Did you notice any difference between the handling in England and here?

No, not really. England has really come a long way. Some of the European countries we see when they come over to judge, things are very different. But no, England is not very different. They are very much the same. They are more low-key, a little less on time and things, I like that. But the presentation was quite good. I was very impressed; the people in England were just fabulous, friendly and nice, just excellent. And like here, they have some who were really good handlers and some who weren't. But the good ones were every bit as good as the ones here. The grooming is maybe a little different. In our breed, luckily as a whole we are not terribly overgroomed. You don't want to see too much of it. Once in a while you do, but you don't see too much extreme as far as that goes. The English dogs have more hair, but that is probably the climate, the humid climate just grows a longer, nicer coat.

Was there anything that surprised you, or that you noticed as different between England and here?

Not as far as my end of judging, but on a whole there, the biggest thing that they have which I feel is a problem is they have so few shows that everybody knows everybody and everybody shows up at every show, and all the judges know everybody. If you get a dog on a winning streak, it is very hard to break into that. You can almost say, "Next weekend whose turn is it?" It's such a small group; they only have twenty shows a year or something like that in the country. That's a problem if you are an exhibitor there.

Coming as a judge, you are not at all affected, but as a local judge there, it is kind of tough. It is such a hard, hard thing to get a championship there because you have to beat everybody. If you have one dog that is winning all the time, there can be a year that they don't have a champion in the country in that breed. You have to beat that dog to get your championship. You don't have champion classes; it is Open, and everybody shows together. You have to beat all the champions and all the top dogs to get your title, so it is much, much harder. Many older dogs, too. Most dogs don't get their championship over there until they are four or five years old. It is a much harder system as far as that goes.

You mentioned the differences between owner/handling and professionals.

In Bernese Mountain Dogs there are a lot of people who totally hurt their dog's chance of winning by their handling. I have pictures from the first National I ever showed at, with Iner, my foundation bitch, in the 9-12 Puppy class. The judge was standing there looking at the class. There were ten of us, and I had the only dog in the ring that was set up. All of the rest of them were looking around, standing this way or that. Well, things have improved since then, but we still have plenty of those in the breed. (laughter) They are much better than they were then, but you still have to watch for a lot of things. When you are judging, you really have to work at getting them to show their dog. A lot of judges won't do that, so the better handled dogs win. A lot of times you see what they are doing. They go down and back, around and crooked – the dog stands really nice by itself, but they can stretch it out all funny – there would be some improvement there, for sure. We certainly have more who do a good job, but we still have plenty to learn. But that's refreshing, because we don't have a lot of big-name handlers in the breed. But you do have to sort through it sometimes.

Is there anything in particular that handlers do that you find annoying?

Not really. As a judge you just take control and don't let them. Everybody tends to run around too fast. It's that way with most breeds. They don't make the dogs look better. This breed scrambling around doesn't look better, you know. Usually, if I say right off the bat, "Nice and easy, slow gait," people know and I don't have a lot of problem with that. People pay attention. You just have to say something. This is a working dog, it is supposed to have a slow trot. Seriously, the biggest thing is most of the people do that, and they may have a good-moving dog but it doesn't look good just because they are scrambling too much. They actually look better if they slow down. They have watched and think that is the way to go. Again, that is not from knowledge; that is from the leader, doing the "in" thing. In this breed, certainly, slower doesn't hurt the dogs, it helps the dogs.

Have you also done obedience?

I haven't in recent years. Years ago I showed my Old English Sheepdog in obedience. I don't have the time now. I really don't like doing obedience; it makes me a nervous wreck.

Do you judge Junior Showmanship?

Yes, I judge juniors. I enjoy juniors tremendously. Some of the best handlers are juniors. They are some fabulous handlers. Some of them are so good they could teach everybody in the place! (laughter) It is hard; it's one of the harder things to judge because of the quality, it's so good. Especially in the senior classes, you can get some phenomenal handlers. In certain parts of the country it is not so good, but if you go to California, and judge an Open Senior class, you will be hard-pressed to fault any of them. Then you are really looking for the one who has the most rapport and the whole picture that works the best. They can be very competitive.

Are there any areas in the U.S. where you think the dogs may be a little bit better?

Probably the two coasts as opposed to the middle section of the country. But actually, a few years ago I would have said Colorado. That may still be true; they have had some better dogs through the years. I hate to sound negative, but there are pockets.

Is there a tendency for judges to hesitate putting up bitches for Best of Breed?

I don't think it is as much as people tend to believe. Some judges certainly go the other way and put up more girls. But in a lot of breeds, and in this one certainly, the boys are just so much prettier dogs. They are bigger, more impressive, and if you have a good one, it is really hard not to put it up. In the last years, for many years, very often the top dog in the country was a bitch. We have had that happen a lot. The bitches tend to be on the whole maybe a little better put together. I think if you have a good bitch you can do just as well as a boy. My problem with campaigning a bitch is that they get out of their cycles, they are not in their breeding, then if they are that good, they should be having puppies, not being shown. Again, I speak through one of my mentors Pat Trotter, she's a firm believer that you breed them before you campaign them. Then you have some puppies and something to work with. Then if you have one that is that good, you campaign it after they have had a litter or two. That way you at least have some start. So many of the top bitches in most breeds never really have much in the way of puppies, because by the time they are done, they are just getting older. That is definitely a waste. That is my big problem with specialing a bitch. If they are that good, they should be having puppies. Also in this breed, it is fairly hard to campaign a female just because they tend to go completely naked after their seasons, so you really have to balance it to find time when you can show them.

Do you feel that only breeder-judges should judge specialties?

Oh, gosh, no. You need the variety. Breeder-judges bring a certain perspective to the breed which is important, but all-around ones do, too. That balance is really important. In either direction, you could really

BEST IN
SWEEPSTAKES
BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG
CLUB OF AMERICA
NATIONAL SPECIALTY
1988
THE STANDARD IMAGE
SANDY TATHAM

Ch. Happiness Diamond In The Ruff, Best in Sweepstakes, BMDCA 1988, judge Mary Alice Eschweiler. Photo by Patrick G. Hatch.

screw up a breed good. Specialty wins are SO important because everybody pays attention to who wins the specialties. If somebody has done a really bad job, it can really hurt a breed. That is the one place where a judge has incredible impact, because there are plenty of people who do their own judging, but there are lots who don't, and when that dog wins a specialty, it becomes a very important dog and a lot of people will use him for stud. That is a big responsibility. You really need to think about breeding stock when you are judging a specialty. That's true at any time, but it is really important at a specialty.

That is the whole point of dog shows, right?

Exactly! In England I had said that to some people and their reaction was, "Huh?" Even a judge said, "I never thought of that before; that is an interesting perspective!" I thought they started it! (laughter) I tend to try to judge a little bit in the sense of what a breed is really lacking in, and maybe go a little bit more toward that when I am putting a dog up. If I see the general breed is lacking in a certain trait, if I have two good ones and one stronger in the trait that the breed is lacking in, I would more likely put that dog up. I am always trying to look at judging from, "What would I do if I was breeding?" Not that you can, but it's a breeders' perspective. Not that you can always find it, because sometimes it is missing everywhere, but you still try. That is hard to do in new breeds that you have, but you can still get a perspective, talk to people, you can get a moral perspective. If you do a specialty, by the time you get to Best of Breed, you should have a pretty good idea of what the breed is lacking.

Are there any judges past or present who you really respect?

Anne Rogers Clark. She is a teacher and one of the best people we have ever had in dogs. I have been lucky enough to do an in-ring observation with her a couple of times, and I have learned more than anywhere else. She is fabulous, an asset in teaching. There have been lots of people through the years, but she is the one who jumps to mind as being a huge help. Teaching to me is really the most important thing someone can do with their life, because that is where it goes on. What you do yourself is not going to be nearly as important as what you have taught somebody else.

Do you have anyone you are mentoring right now?

We live in an out-of-the-way place, so I don't have anyone I am specifically mentoring, but I certainly talk to a lot of people in the breeds that I'm involved with, and I work with a lot of people. I am interested any time I can get the opportunity, I enjoy it. We don't have too many people around, so I do at shows and such.

Do you still get to a good amount of shows?

I do, but nothing like I used to; I still show at probably fifteen or twenty shows a year. I really enjoy showing, I love showing dogs. Like I've said many times, if I were made to choose between showing and judging – which some people think you HAVE to – I would definitely still show dogs. I love to show dogs. I don't judge my own breed locally at all. You just have to be careful and try not to judge in an area where you show. It's not terribly hard to do.

What are your feelings toward crowd favorites and applause?

I don't think it affects anybody at all. I don't even hear it, to be honest. When I am judging I am so concentrated on what I am doing. Sometimes it can affect things negatively because it bothers the dogs. Some dogs it hypes up, so there it might help because the dog maybe shows more and that sort of thing. But as far as actually judging, I couldn't tell you who got the most applause; I don't even hear it. I am there concentrating, and it is just background noise. I don't think it affects many people at all. It may be kind of fun, certainly if you are at the end of the things at the National, I have a video that I won in 1988, and it makes the whole thing a lot more fun, but it certainly didn't affect the judge.

As an exhibitor, does it affect you?

It does like I said, but I really don't notice it in the ring, either. When I am showing, unless it involves the dog and somebody spooks the dog or something. Once in a while you go to a class and there is one dog that nobody claps for. That's kind of obnoxious. With some judges, most times that would not be a positive. It might make them say, "Oh, come on, guys; let's get real here!" Other than that, I can't say I notice it one way or another.

Is the parent club or the local clubs doing enough to educate judges about this breed?

They haven't been. I'm now on that committee, and we are trying to get really active. For the last few years, they have not been doing much. Finally there are some new people involved and we are trying to get pretty active. It has been really lacking. That is the most important thing the national club can do. That is the single most important thing! Educating judges is what really has more impact down the road rather than anything else. Ringside mentoring, seminars, mailing out things; it is important to send out letters to judges when there is a big problem. I appreciate those myself as a judge – all of it together, giving support to local seminars, maybe funding those hand-outs, or giving them the CD with pictures that they could use, or whatever. It's really important, and it needs to be a much more active thing. We had a pretty good seminar last year at the National, and we are putting one together for this year's National, just starting to get more stuff mailed out and more accessible. It has been something pretty lacking in this breed for the last few years.

Do you think it's true that a person has to have "an eye" for a dog, or can you learn it?

An eye for a dog is something you are born with. Those people make the best judges. But, I believe a person who is willing to really take the time to learn can still be a really good judge. It's just a much harder job. If you have an eye, it sort of comes naturally. It is sort of obvious. I talk to judges all the time who say, "There's the one!" I wonder how they get to there, but they just know. It takes a while, but if you work the dogs a lot, it helps. If you spend your whole life with dogs, certainly it becomes obvious.

But a judge can still learn to become a good judge even if they don't have that eye. It just takes a lot more study and a lot more work. A really good dog person, and a really good horse person, a really good person with an eye doesn't have to have any real reasons. They can tell you right off. I always tell people, "If you have a litter of puppies and you can't decide, find somebody on the street and have them come look at the dogs. Someone who doesn't know anything about the dogs." The pup that really has the balance and all that is going to stand out.

A lot of people educate themselves into not seeing that because they are so worried about the faults. They have so much criteria that they quit looking at the whole picture. I know it is very true that people fault judge their puppies and come up with the wrong puppies because they are not looking to pick the best overall picture. Forget it! Don't look at the details, because the details are just going to screw you up.

Is that how you choose your puppies?

Yes. If you have two that are great, then you can pick on the details. But usually a really great dog is the only one. If people say 90 percent of the litter is really uniform, I would say, "No, they are all just nice dogs." A really wonderful dog is never one of a bunch. It almost always stands out. Certainly there are some breeds that maybe don't have obvious good or bad characteristics – Brittanys may be an example of the average type dog; the very best ones don't have outstanding type, because that is not part of what the breed should be. But in Bernese Mountain Dogs, a really good one should be very obvious.

At what age do you evaluate your puppies for pet and show quality?

We like our puppies to go from seven to eight weeks. All research shows that is when their personalities do the best, and to me that is critical. Also, if you talk to anyone who is really up on it, they will tell you if you can't figure it out by eight weeks, you aren't gonna. (laughter) A lot of times the best ones go all haywire. So look at them at eight weeks, then close your eyes and open them again at two years, and you will say, "Oh, yes, I did pick the best one." Some of the best dogs go through the most unbelievably strange growth stages.

Pet versus show, as little puppies I really don't sell show dogs to people. But the ones I pick, in this breed, I am looking for the square, stocky little short-legged dog that has lots of bone and has a burly, cute little dog appeal. Balance is a thing that is so hard to see. When you say that a person who has "an eye" for an animal, that is what they are able to see, the balance. Balance is a really hard thing to teach. It is either there or it is not there. When you have an eye for it, it is pretty obvious, but it seems to be the hardest thing for people to grasp.

The other thing that I have a hard time in judging – and in breeding, too – lots of people tend to use that fault judging again. My experience has been the very best dogs that have the strongest qualities quite often have the strongest faults also. So when you get a dog that is fault-free, it is usually a pretty mediocre animal. Again, that is a generic show dog thing. The dogs that please everybody tend to be sort of nondescript. If you do that judging where they have three people, chances are they will pick the most nondescript dog. One doesn't like this thing, that one doesn't like that thing, so it all comes down to which has the least things you don't like instead of who has the best virtues. In breeding and in judging I would always go with a dog that has the strongest virtues even if it has some obvious faults, if it has all the good stuff. That is why so many breeds have gone downhill, because everybody is kind of breeding for that medium dog. If you keep breeding medium to medium, you get less and less quality, if you don't have any qualities to bring the whole level up. That is kind of what happens in the whole dog show world, it goes toward picking between mediocre dogs.

You can teach anybody off the street in five minutes what to look for in a cowhocked dog. It doesn't take any eye at all. You can teach somebody what eye color they are supposed to have. You can teach somebody what coat they are supposed to have, or whatever. But to teach someone the whole balanced picture of a dog can take years. It depends on the person. I have known people who have been in dogs for ten minutes and could pick out spectacular dogs every time. I have known others who have been working at it for ten years and still couldn't tell you. It just depends on how your mind works, on your personality, and certainly, the more you work with animals, I don't care if it is dogs or horses. In all animals balance is balance; I should say all four-legged animals. Chickens probably don't have the same balance! (laughter) But anything that is a four-legged trotting animal is going to be pretty much the same kind of thing.

Are your breedings natural or controlled?

The chilled and frozen semen doesn't work very well in Bernese Mountain Dogs. We have trouble breeding to them, and it is a tough breed. They are not very prolific dogs. The cooled semen, or fresh chilled, works a little bit. Some people have used it and had some luck. But with the frozen, I think there have ever been only maybe four or five pups. We tried; we froze Ch. Ashley. Of course that was in frozen semen's beginning. We tried all sorts of things, but never could get it to work. There are a few people who have had a little luck, but the breed is very hard to get to take. The Berners – even artificially dog to dog, doesn't work very well. Not nearly like the statistics say. Most of them are born by cesarean. We have very few that will have them naturally, which is very weird for this big breed, but it is part of being nice, quiet, laid-back dogs. They seem to say, "Oh, it's too much work." (laughter) We definitely have a lot that are born by cesarean, and some people are having a little luck with the fresh chilled, but I have not had a lot.

How many litters should a bitch have, and how young and old should she be bred?

With Bernese, we quite often have ones that don't come into heat but once a year. I really think if that is the case, you should breed them every time. Once a year is about right for a dog to have puppies. I am a firm believer in breeding them fairly close together as young dogs. This breed, because of our longevity issues, by the time they are six they are getting to be an old dog. So if you haven't bred them very closely you will have very few puppies out of a dog. I did breed one at seven years a long time ago, and we lost her during the cesarean. I am afraid they are just old dogs by that age, which is a shame and part of our whole problem. So I'll breed a lot of times back-to-back and then skip. Mother nature says that when they come into heat, they could have puppies every time and not have too big a problem with it. A lot of times people in this breed will breed them and then skip two or three seasons, and then never get them in whelp again.

Do you know why there are reproductive problems in these dogs?

I don't know if anybody has ever really looked into it. I think the whole picture of the dog is that this is not a very vigorous dog. It is all part of the same lack of longevity. It is just not a real viable healthy dog on the whole. You keep trying to select for that, and certainly I've had some improvement. People need to be picking for vigor. Since we can't get a specific handle on the cancer, we might, but I'm not sure we will. The smart thing to do would be to pick for vigorous dogs out of vigorous lines who had plenty of ancestors who lived long and had normal puppies, or most normal dogs. It is all interconnected. I don't think there has been any scientific studies done.

There will be a lot of readers who find this interesting.

I hope so, because most of them have the best intentions. It is not that they don't care, they just don't have much access to information. They don't know anything about it, or if what they are doing is right or not. The internet has done a huge disservice to dogs on a whole because it used to be we would go to the Cow Palace; they had their benched show every year. They would get hundreds of people come in who would ask serious, real questions about how to breed, what to do, what your viewpoint was or whatever. We quit going a couple of years ago because it got to the point where you didn't get any of those people because they figure they already know it all because they read it all on the internet. They quit talking to anybody!

The information on the internet might be good, but it might not be, and you don't have any perspective to know. People tend to think if it is in writing, it's true! It is no different than a conversation. It is no more true, but it looks like it's more true. I get calls all the time from people who have done all the research on the internet, and they haven't seen one of the dogs in person, yet they want to buy one! I say, "Wait a minute!" There is a lot more in-person stuff, and what they have read may be all wrong. You need to talk to a lot of people and look at lots of dogs to see their perspective. That has been a real disservice. People read all that and they think they know what they are doing. They are an expert so now they can do it right, because they read it.

Is there any literature out there you could recommend regarding Bernese?

Most of the books that are out on the breed are good, basic books that tell some history and so on. The book I mentioned earlier, *The Beautiful Bernese Mountain Dog*, by Diane Russ, is an excellent book for a novice person. It tells a lot about the breed and history and so on. Most of the books are all pretty decent. I don't really think there is one, to my knowledge, that has addressed the health problems and issues. They are just now translating a book from a man in Germany that could be very interesting. I haven't read it yet, but I know that is in the process.

Do you have any funny, sad, or strange whelpings you have sat in on?

I have too many to tell! A lot of breeders in this breed don't let them try to whelp. They just do cesareans, because most of the time that is where you will end up. I'm a believer in that you are never going to know where you are going, so I let my young bitches try, and then if we have to go do an emergency cesarean, we do, but at least you know where you are at. There are a lot of middle-of-the-night stories.

Bernese can have problems, and this is well worth saying for novice people: many veterinarians will not believe that they are not going to have puppies naturally, and they will not do cesareans. Or they wait too long; they eventually do them, but by then it's too late. It makes sense to them; Berners don't look like they should have problems, since they are a great big dog, and they look like it should be natural. All my puppy people who have any intention of breeding I say, "Okay, keep me informed, find a vet and when I say it's time, we'll do it." I talk to novice people all the time who have lost their litters because the vets say, "Oh, no, we gave them the oxytocin and the calcium," and all the normal things they do – but it does not work with Bernese. I agree completely with Sylvia Howison, you never give oxytocin until you have had some puppies, because you will lose that litter every time. It is one of those things; they are not a normal dog, so make sure you have a breeder you work with who can tell you yes, things are right, or no, things are not right. The vets will almost always make you wait too long. They think if they leave them alone, it's fine. I have seen bitches go weeks past due date, and when they go in, of course all the pups are dead. I have known people to lose their bitch, because they weren't going to believe that they just weren't going to have them. They don't go into labor, so if we can get that across to novice people, that would be a good direction.

Have you ever tried a whelping monitor?

I have not used it, because I have a pretty good handle on not waiting, but it might be a really good idea for novice people. It could give you a better idea if they are really in stress or not. The biggest thing with Bernese, as opposed to other dogs, is that everything appears to be normal. They don't show anything; I'm not sure you would see anything happening on a monitor. I don't know. It would be interesting to see. They don't act like anything is unusual, they eat fine, they're playful. You would never know they were pregnant except looking at them. They never have symptoms.

I actually look at dates more than anything. I have a feel for what I am doing. I look at dates and I won't let them go past a certain time, even if they are not doing anything. If they don't have anything happening by a certain date, they are going to have a cesarean. You know, they say on dogs it is 63 days on the absolute outside, but I won't go past 60 days if I know when the breeding was exactly. Usually there are some things. We take temperatures, and sometimes that works but sometimes it doesn't. The ones I have been around, almost always give you a little inkling that they are acting a little different. But most novice people would miss it. The biggest thing is don't wait too long.

I should have been talking to a

BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG
CLUB OF AMERICA, INC.
APRIL 8 & 9, 1989
CLASS
WINNER
KOHLER
VETERAN BITCH
KOHLER

Ch. Deer Park Ferkin v Buttonwillow (Ch. Klaus v Buchsischolssli x Ch. Deer Park Brta v Buttonwillow), Veteran Bitch, BMDCA, April 1989, judge Sylvia Howison. Top producer of fourteen champions. Breeder Diane Russ.

close friend of mine who had been breeding for quite a while. There was an x-ray done close to the due date and the pups were very small so she was told the date was wrong. We had bred the bitch three times, and I have to admit, I really didn't pay that much attention. Well, she didn't start whelping so they finally did a cesarean and the pups were dead. They were probably three or four days too late. This is someone who has been breeding for twenty years, not a lot, but occasional litters. The biggest thing I would say is to find someone who is willing to help you and talk you through the whole thing. Don't think that you can do it on your own, or that the vet is going to give you the right advice.

What are the good things about

this breed?

They are such a fabulous breed! Their personality is not like any other breed of dog I know. Once you have them, you are not happy with anything else. You put up with all the mess. Lots of breeders get out of the breed, I know. There is no doubt, they have tons of problems. They are very heartbreaking, and I have had many people, including well-known people say, "It's a tough breed; it's a hard breed." But they get under your skin and they are fabulous dogs, there is nothing like them as far as being totally devoted and part of you and the family. I don't know of anybody who has gotten a Bernese and then gotten another breed down the road. Most of the people who quit breeding still have their dogs; they just quit breeding and they buy them from somebody else. They still have them, because they love the dogs. They just couldn't take the stress of the breeding. It's a hard thing.

They are wonderful dogs and they give their all to you. On the good side, they are usually totally healthy before they drop dead. They aren't unhealthy in the meantime, so that's a positive. You have six or eight years of a wonderful, healthy dog. In a lot of breeds, that's actually all they have. Some dogs are sick their whole life. They may live to be twelve, but they are not well. I know people who get disgusted and lose one to cancer, and then say, "Okay, I'm not going to get another one." Five years down the road, they get another one. They might get something else in the meantime, but it's just not the same. They want a Bernese! (laughter) They are just that way. People are devoted to them. I know most of the long-time breeders who are now elderly, and they still all have the breed although they are now not involved. They didn't make the move to a Chihuahua or a small dog. That would be really strange!

Who was your favorite dog?

That's a hard one. I have had lots. I have had current ones and old-time favorites. Certainly one of my favorites, because of being on the road all the time and campaigning him was Sparky. I showed him for a couple of years, really pretty heavily, drove all over the west, and got really much more attached to him because of that. He was probably my most favorite Bernese. But I have some now that are favorites. If they have the right personality that a Bernese should have, they are fabulous dogs.

We have skittish dogs in the breed, and we have ones that are spooky and that kind of thing. They show up occasionally, and they are hard to like, but you put up with them. You take care of them but it is hard to really get attached to a dog like that. You don't breed them at all, because it is definitely genetic. People try to tell you, "Oh, something happened to him," but there is no question about it, spooky dogs are born that way. I get dogs in the grooming shop all the time that were rescued because they were abused. I'm sorry, but in my experience, abused dogs get mean, they don't get scared. Scared dogs are born afraid. They stay that way. You can get them better, but they are never going to have a correct temperament. Ignored dogs tend to sometimes be shy, but I have seen abused dogs, and they are always mean, they are not scared. People think a dog is always an abused dog when it is scared – I have several dogs myself that are scared, and I guarantee you they were never abused.

Talking to the experts on dog temperament, they all agree that the genetic spookiness starts at puberty. The dog is friendly until five or six months old and one day they are scared of everything and they stay that way. That is not just a Bernese thing; that is talking to the dog experts. That is something that is really genetic. Dogs that are kind of shy when they are little puppies, that is generally environmental. You can usually bring those along out of that. But it just clicks – we had a dog that we showed one day, she was fine, and the next day she came out of her crate scared to death and she was scared the rest of her life. Nothing happened; it was like a paranoid schizophrenic person. It just kicked in. It has to be something.

There was a seminar at the university here put on by an animal behaviorist and he was talking about the research they were doing, and was talking about this specific thing, and it is true in all dogs. He said it is absolutely genetic. With spooky puppies, usually it is a lack of exposure. But with really spooky dogs, it's usually later in life. It's an easy one to breed away from. It doesn't come generation after generation. As long as you realize it, it can be handled. A lot of people say, "Oh, something happened to them," so they keep adding generations because they don't do something to improve it. They don't think it is genetic. Well, it is. I'm sure! I have raised my own that were bad, and when they are spooky, they are spooky. That goes along with judging too, if you have an adult dog of any breed that is really shy, you shouldn't award it. Period! I don't care how good it is.

How difficult is that for a judge to recognize?

If you put your hands on them, you can immediately feel it. To me, it is obvious. That is something a lot of times you don't see. Dogs have to be companions. In the world today – aloof is different. An Anolatian Shepherd is friendly and wags his tail, that is incorrect. They should kind of ignore you. That is fine, that is correct for some of those breeds. But shirking and being afraid in any dog certainly should be faulted. Most definitely in a Bernese Mountain Dog. They should be kissing you! (laughter) I have a little article I wrote on type, and I said if you look a Bernese Mountain Dog in the face, and you don't immediately want to kiss it, that's incorrect.

I have heard about the expression in this breed.

Yes, and it is totally there. It is the same thing that we are talking about. We aren't seeing harsh expressions, but we are seeing more of what I call a Rottweiler expression. It is correct for a Rottweiler, they should be a tougher-looking dog. That is what they are supposed to be. But we see some people who are breeding for that bigger, heavier look. Part of that same whole picture, the pretty soft outline and all that, is part of that same picture. There are getting to be a lot of them that are not pretty.

I had a puppy person call, a total novice who has never had the breed, looking for a Portuguese Water Dog. I started talking to her, and she found out that I had Bernese Mountain Dogs. She said, "Oh, I had one of those years ago, but now they're so ugly. They don't look soft and pretty like they used to; now they look like St. Bernards." She had gone to a dog show, so this person was a total novice with no knowledge of dogs at all. So yes, we have some problems there. That is what they see, and then everybody decides that bigger is better, the more impressive the dog. But then it starts not looking like a Bernese.

What is correct in a St. Bernard is what is correct in a St. Bernard. They are supposed to have their big, heavy head. They are supposed to look that way. If you get that kind of head on a Bernese it is completely wrong. It loses that soft, sweet expression and it goes back to the same thing: if you don't want to kiss it, it is wrong. If it looks like maybe your little guard dog, if you feel nervous about it, it's just wrong. It should have no semblance of that. Plus, you get all those things, they can look stupid, or they can look kind of dumb – all of those are not that sweet, soft, pretty expression. If you see a right one, there is no question about it. You just want to hug it, you want it in your lap.

How intelligent is this breed compared with others?

Not real intelligent. People always call and say they want a smart dog, and I tell them no, they really don't. The best pet is not a smart dog. The really smart dogs can be a total pain. Once you get them trained, they may be pretty good, but the best pet is the dog that totally wants to please, which is why Bernese are so fabulous. It has nothing to do with intelligence. You can have a very smart dog that has no interest in pleasing. Being really ready to please is usually diametrically opposed from smartness. So, no, they are not a very smart dog, but they are a very trainable dog.

Smart dogs are hard to live with. If you take a Bernese Mountain Dog and don't do any training, other than housebreaking, that is it and they are fine. They are fabulous pets! You can take them anywhere, they are wonderful, you can take them out in society. They are no problem. That is just the way the breed is. Other dogs, my other breed, in fact, Portuguese Water Dogs, if you don't do strict obedience training, you have a dog you can't live with. That is just the drive they have. It can be a wonderful dog, but they have to be trained.

I always tell people when they call, "Okay, you HAVE to do obedience." With Bernese, you don't have to do that. They don't have that instinct. They don't get into anything, they don't chew things up, they don't do things wrong. You tell them once, "No," and they are like, "Oh, sorry. I'll never do that again!" That is just the way they are and that is what is so famous about the breed. That is the thing that keeps people coming back to them. They get crushed if you get mad at them. It ruins their whole day. They are very sensitive, and that is part of being really trainable. That is part of not being really smart. But they also don't try to figure out how to get out of things.

You can keep most Bernese in a three-foot little pen and they don't ever try to leave. They are not jumpers, and they don't try to dig out. They don't tend to get into trouble. If you put them in a crate they are happy to be there, and they are not trying to figure out, "How do I get out?" It is part of that attitude, take anything that goes along in stride. They are just happy with the world. They are never trying to figure out what is going on. That is probably their biggest beauty, they are happy dogs who love everybody and everything. They love other dogs, other people, wherever they are. Whatever is going on, they are happy. They are trying to figure out, "What could I do better?" But that is also why they are not great obedience dogs. They do okay, but if you tell them for the fifth time to sit straight, they are going to go, "What is wrong with you? I'm sitting here!" (laughter)

It's like retrieving, they look at you like, "Why did you throw it away?" But that is very classic Bernese. I always tell people that the best pets are definitely not smart dogs. These are fabulous companions; you are their whole world. They have no other agenda. They don't hunt, or herd – they totally worship you; you are all they care about. That is why they get under people's skin and even with all the problems.

How many dogs do you have here?

I have fifteen dogs and all my dogs are housedogs; I don't have a kennel. I have yards on either side of the house with doors into the house. The house was designed for the dogs in that sense. There are lots of little nuances here that you don't see for the dogs.

This is a beautiful place, surrounded by 30 acres of ponderosa, and you say the house was built to accommodate the dogs.

We did a lot of things to accommodate the dogs. For example, we have three adult males, who are fine together when we are home, but when we are gone we don't leave them together. The layout was designed to have different sections, with a wrought-iron gate, so this can be a kennel with the dog door and the house. Then there is another pen on the other side yard, which is about the same size but goes into a different side of the house. When we are not home, they have access to the house but not together. We have two different places where they can be separated.

Then this is a porch for puppies made out of TREX, which is totally disinfectable. There is a little dog door here, and as soon as they get to be about five weeks old, they will have a small pen inside and the yard outside. We put them in this little pen, and they immediately go outside. They never have an accident in the house once they have access. By the time they go to their new homes, they are totally thinking about going out to go to the bathroom. It makes

Ch. Blackjack Flossi v Deer Park. Photo by Patrick G. Hatch.

housebreaking much easier. It helps a lot just having the mind-set of going out. And it is in the kitchen in the main house, so they are not off somewhere. They are in the house with everything going on. So that is a modification.

In my office is where they whelp, and we put Dutch doors both there and into the laundry room, so there are two more places that are still part of the household but dogs can be separated if need be for some reason. You can hear the Dutch door because the puppies can go in there. There is an automatic dog waterer on the wall, so they all have water. This vinyl flooring is easier on their joints than tile or concrete. It is softer and not so slippery. This breed is big and heavy as a puppy, so if they slide around you can have a lot orthopedic problems. We did lots of little things. Everything is washable, the floor down there is stamped concrete, so it is no big deal if somebody has an accident. We have fifteen adult dogs, not counting puppies, I don't count them because they are not staying. We have in-floor heat, and we also put in an air-filtering system. Bernese are funny. They go nuts and then they go and lie down;

they want to say hello. One of the problems is that the puppies jump up over the big dogs to get their petting. They like to get their share of attention.

Where do they sleep?

All sorts of places. The puppies all sleep in crates in the garage, because they are not trustworthy yet, but our dogs earn their privileges as they get older and can be trusted. So they are all housedogs, not in kennels.

What do you feed your dogs?

I feed Purina High Pro. I have used it for 30 years. I have tried a few other brands, but I always go back to it. I think a lot of the new brands have all kinds of strange problems related, which could be another two-hour discussion. Purina changed the formula in it a little, about ten years ago they added a little more beef to it, but it is an interesting food. It is the food that almost all the field dog and sled dog people use. To me, they are looking for performance and how a dog feels, and that tells me of what is healthy more than anything else. It has been around forever; Purina doesn't push it. I think it is a profitable thing for them, because it is a really high-grade food for a pretty reasonable price, and they don't promote it at all. It's available everywhere, but they never advertise it. I was talking with a well-known person about her expertise on the different kinds of food and she said it had the least problems for puppies. So I use it right from the beginning, I don't feed puppy food, nor vitamin supplements. Some table scraps and fresh stuff is fine. No problem there. But I don't give any kind of chemical stuff. Bernese grow too fast, and they tend to be real thrifty dogs, easy keepers, so you keep them as thin as you can growing up.

What do you do for conditioning?

They do a lot of that themselves. Behind us is national forest for 60 miles, so I walk out the back and they get a lot of exercise but they really keep each other in shape. There aren't any secrets to grooming Bernese. Berners are the easiest long-haired breed in existence because they don't have an undercoat. They have a single coat, so if somebody brushes them once a month they are fabulous.

The biggest tip is having enough room so they can play with each other. We don't keep anybody isolated, so they all get to have fun.

Do you do whiskers, trim feet and all that stuff?

I do. I like the way a dog looks without its whiskers, but I have to admit as a judge I never notice. I trim my dogs because I personally like the way they look. Really, with this breed all you have to do is wash them, give them a good drying, we use a forced air dryer to blow them dry, and trim their feet and hocks, that's about it. You are ready to go. That is part of why I got in the breed, after Old English Sheepdogs, I wanted something that didn't take coat care. They have fabulous coats. None of these have had a bath in a month or two; they look fine. They don't hold dirt. They can be muddy and when they dry it falls off, the white stays that clean. It's just doesn't hold mud. As far as coat it's the easiest long-haired breed I know.

What advice would you give to breeders who are just starting out?

The biggest advice I would say would be to ask, talk to people, and find yourself someone who is willing to help. Don't think you know what you are doing. I mean, I know a lot less now than I did when I got my first one. That's the total truth. There are people who are willing, but people just won't ask. Get on the phone and call somebody, hopefully a person who is knowledgeable and is willing to work with you. That's why I tell people who are looking at the puppies, when they are looking for a dog, find a person who you can relate to, who you want to totally talk to and you agree with what they are doing, and wait until they have a dog for you. That is going to hopefully be a 20- or 30-year relationship, and that is where all your information has to come from. If you don't have that up front, even if you have to wait for a dog, you are much better off. Hopefully you will have several and it will go on for a long time. That is more important than who has done what or what the record is. Find the person first. The dogs all come and go, but the personal relationships are forever.

Are there any secret fantasies you might be harboring, any big wins you'd like?

I would like a dog that could be competitive at the Group and Best in Show level, but without the campaigning. There are dogs like that; we have had some in the breed. When they did go out, they won. I would love to have a dog like that. I would also like to have a dog that stayed healthy for ten or eleven years. My biggest dream would be to get to the point where we could have a LOT of the dogs live to be old dogs. That is the most important thing. We're working on it!

Is there anything you would like to talk about that we didn't touch on?

We have covered a lot, but I want to stress if you are a new person, find people and talk to them, and try to learn. Don't think that you can come up with some brilliant new deal. Try to work with what other people have done.

Patrick: You have to be the one in charge. If not, the dog thinks it's in charge and this is where you have problems. This is true in all breeds.

Denise: As far as people who are new to breeding: if you are interested in learning about breeding, breed to what the standard is and what is correct. NOT what is winning in the show ring! It may be hard to learn what that is, but take the time to talk to people, look at the old dogs, look at things and find out what's correct. If you breed that way, eventually the show ring will come around to you. Don't breed because that is the dog that wins. This win-at-all-cost mentality is totally a detriment. You hear crazy stuff that people will look past and do, because it is a big winning dog. Breed for what is right for the breed. You will still get plenty of percentages of doing well in the show ring, but ten years down the road you will have something you are proud of as opposed to something that just won back then. It comes around.

Thank you very much.

You're welcome. •